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THE EPISTLES OF OUR LORD
TO
THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

THE EPISTLES OF OUR LORD
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THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

BY
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PREFACE.

PUBLICATION is in these days not so rare an enterprise that one need be at pains to justify it in each instance. Without, therefore, attempting to analyse and explain the motives which may have prompted the issue of this little volume, I would, by it, invite the continued attention of those into whose hands it may come, to one of the richest portions of the Word of God. What they shall find in the following lectures is no more than may, in conformity with the present ideas of preaching, be delivered from our pulpits, a popular exhibition of the meaning of the text, and an application of the truth thus discovered to the various 'sorts and conditions' of men who come together in the pew. For the execution of the former part of this twofold task I am greatly indebted to the able and well-nigh exhaustive commentaries

PREFACE.

of Alford, Stier, Trench, and Oosterzee; and in respect of the latter branch, while equally conscious of obligation to others, I neither find it in my power to make acknowledgments to individuals, nor am I sure that, though I could do so, they would count it a proper expression of gratitude to connect their names with this volume.

M. D.

GLASGOW, *November 1866.*



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I.

Ephesus.

REV. II. 1-7.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write ; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks ;

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil : and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars :

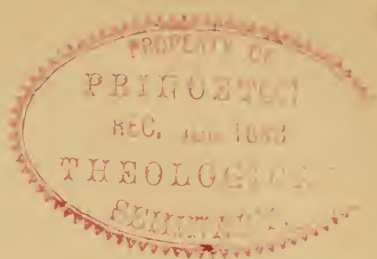
And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.



I. ***T**HE Person of our Lord as here described.—*

Our Lord here assumes a title which declares his right to address authoritatively all the seven churches. It is He who is the Upholder and Governor of the churches who is about to speak: 'He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' Any expression which brings the Head of the church out of the dim distance, and gives Him a place and a work among us, is to be valued. This expression tells us not of His eternal character, but of his present occupation. It reminds us of His connection now with ourselves. He is not distant nor idle; He walketh among the churches. The inheritance so dearly purchased is still His care. He does not abandon it to be trodden and wasted at the pleasure of His enemies. He does not leave it to chance whether His

vineyard shall produce any fruit, or only worthless fruit. On the earth he fought for dominion; and still this battle-field is dear to Him,—dear not only as the scene of His victory, nor only as bound to Him by singular associations, but as containing still in a precarious state much of what He laboured to secure. Those who represent Him on earth, therefore, He holds in His right hand: to be lifted up, or to be cast down; to be commissioned, to be impelled, to be strengthened; to be sheltered also and guided, and held in safety to the end. This is now occupying His attention, and on this He is spending His strength; so that, if we will receive the full force of the figure, Christ is so employed in this work, that, to our conception at least, He has only His left hand free for any other occupation. If, then, you are in any real sense Christ's *angel* or messenger,—if you recognise that as the Father sent Him, so has He sent you into the world to do His work,—if there be any department of Christian exertion, life, or enterprise, with which you have, in a manner, become bound up,—be not afraid either of opposition, or of what is much more alarming, of your own strength failing; for in so far as you have thus given yourself to His work,

in so far will you be kept by His strength,—upheld, and guided, and encouraged also by the friendly and unfailing grasp of that hand out of which none can pluck you. Persevere in all arduous Christian duty, assured that though there is no firmness in you to hold to Him, there is all strength in Him to hold you to Himself. This is not the relaxing grasp of one that has fallen asleep at his work, but the active, conscious, ever-renewed holding of One who is alive to the fact that all depends on His wakefulness. ‘Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.’

He has passed from earth, but still ‘walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks’; is ever superintending, visiting, and acting upon His churches on earth; never, in the great need of one, forgetting the difficulties of the rest; never so bestowing His presence and favour upon one, as to desolate and chill any other; never so taken up with the prosperity of one, as to sit content in it, and build a palace in it; but unceasingly and unweariedly passing, in the plenitude of His grace, from rich to poor, from poor to destitute,—His paths dropping fatness, and causing the mountains, that stand by His strength, and the valleys, whose lowli-

ness He clothes with freshness and fertility, alike to rejoice on every side. When special need of His aid arises, He is not far to seek, nor hard to inform. Already He is in the midst,—not to be sent for from afar, not high above, so as to see only the outside and general appearance of things here below. View a city from a height, and you see the outline and main features of it: you see persons moving to and fro, all apparently much the same; but go down to their midst, and you know a difference; there are not two you would address alike. You see the passion, hardly restrained, that marks one face; the exulting vain-glory and pride of life that shines in another; the self-possessed determination or open friendliness that characterises a third. And what is here claimed by our Lord is not the bird's-eye view, but the close inspection of a bystander, so much interested as to have all his attention aroused,—not so much involved in what is passing as to be hindered in calm and discriminating observation. The great Overseer of the churches thus walks among them, so that He can say to each, as none other can, 'I know thy works.'

It is on this 'I know thy works' that Christ founds whatever He has to say to the churches;

and what He says plainly declares the omniscient range, thoroughness, and precision of His knowledge. The characters He speaks of are distinct from one another; all are not condemned in the mass, nor are all commended for the same virtue. Praise and blame are mingled; mingled, not so as to balance one another, and leave the result nothing, as is sometimes done in human rebuke or counsel: the praise is thrown in, not by way of saving the friendship that may have been endangered by the blame, nor with the hope of making the reproof more acceptable and useful; but still all proceeds from this source, 'I know thy works.' So that often where the church would have been ready, wincing under the rebuke, to plead some offset to her sin,—some abundant fruit in one direction making up for the omission and barrenness in another,—some severe and righteous administering of discipline and regard to decency of worship, more pleasant to look upon than a cooling down of love and hope,—our Lord himself passes on to these, shewing that no breadth and glare of corruption could blind Him to what was worthy of approval,—no recent iniquity blot out the memory of their former service.

All that you have yourselves striven to forget ; all that hypocrisy smooths over or self-deception buries ; all that falsehood or artifice (practised till it has become instinctive) keeps out of view and screens from censure,—is borne on the mind of your Lord : but also much that you have done with such gladness and freedom of service, that you did not count it meritorious but only pleasant ; much that you have done, out of good and honest hearts, in the everyday way of duty, and have long since forgotten, or never observed ; much of what was so mingled with evil, that you would not undertake to separate the good, and say, ‘ This was worthy of being remembered ’ ; much of what you did hesitatingly, in great darkness and fear,—has been accepted of your Lord, and is now known by Him,—held in that eternal omniscience from which the future is not hid, and from which the past does not fade ; while the present—the whole present of all men and all worlds—stands palpable in every minutest detail of it ; from which the striking parts of your character and habitual actions do not blot out the occasional and transient expression of your inward disposition in your outward carriage ; in which there is room for all your

inconsistencies of conduct, each to be separately weighed, and in which there is sufficient material held, as well for the guidance of the church now, as for the ultimate award of the day of the Lord.

But you know that more is required in one who arrogates the right of rebuking or advising you than merely a distinct knowledge of your character. Indeed, you so shrink from the man who penetrates to the springs of your life by sheer intellectual acuteness, that his knowledge of you can do you small good. There must be also sympathy and affection,—something to shew that his knowledge of you is resting on, and is rendered intelligible to him, by his own experience. He must have stood in your place, been urged by the same feelings and desires, and exposed to similar temptations. He must thus be able to enter into your present experience, and teach you from within,—not merely apply advice from without. Who, then, so fit to counsel the church and its individual members as He who has passed before as the church's Forerunner, in whose footsteps the path of the church's experience runs, and without whom there would have been no church, and no church experience, no believer, nor any course

from sin through grace to glory,—no Christian life, with all its various incident, its doubts and fears, its strong purpose and its sense of weakness, its perseverance, and final and blessed event? It is because Christ has lived that the great mass of your feelings, and thoughts, and struggles have been what they have been; and it is because Christ lives that out of these you may hope to issue a fully redeemed son of God, into the everlasting brightness of peace with God, and consciously abundant life in Him. And it is not by one act of grace that He can bring you out of all your evil into all His good, but by the unending constancy of His care,—the *patience* of His love administering willingly and freely, as at the first, the seasonable advice and help. You refuse to have your sore places touched by one whose motive you are not sure of; but the motive of Christ is, that He may ‘present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.’

II. *The Condition of the Church.*—From the first the church of Ephesus had been highly favoured. For three years the apostle of the Gentiles had there delivered his message to Jew and Gentile; and so mightily, in that

great centre of commerce, religion, and philosophy, did the word of God prevail, that books of magic, to the value of 50,000 pieces of silver, were burned by their penitent owners. Not often has so *striking* a sacrifice to the truth been made; nor was it a small movement in the land which could shake the world-renowned and fabulously wealthy temple of Diana of the Ephesians. It was here that Apollos, the eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, mightily convinced the Jews; it was here that Timothy, who from a child knew the holy Scriptures, laboured in building up the church; and it was here that the profound and loving John spent those last years of his life, which called into writing all his memories of his Lord, and all the ripe experience which a century of arduous labour, of danger, and of calamity had made his own. From the writings of John, and from the Epistles of Paul to Timothy, while resident in Ephesus, and to the Ephesians, we may conjecture what the character of this church was. And we find it, as might be expected, to be in harmony with that here described.

The temptations of the Christians of Ephesus were the sensual indulgence and the hasting to be rich to which they had once been

given, and which some of them apparently yet advocated on pretended Christian principles. For these Nicolaitanes here mentioned seem to have been men who had sprung up within the church, and who turned the grace of God into licentiousness. Such there have been always, and such there could scarcely fail to be in a city like Ephesus, where there was much opportunity for gross sin and much cultivation of sophistical reasoning. This heresy of the Nicolaitanes was not a mere doctrinal error, such as a people like the Ephesians, who gave heed to any vain jangling and babbling that would minister question and discussion, might readily fall into; it was a heresy whose main expression was in the life. It was their 'deeds' our Lord hated, and their 'deeds' the faithful in Ephesus condemned. And if even Timothy had to be warned to hold the due mean between abandonment to youthful lusts and that bodily asceticism which profiteth little, how subtle and manifold must have been the allurements to sin to which those who inhabited that city were exposed?

And as we find that, even in his earliest charge to the elders of Ephesus, Paul foretells that 'of your own selves shall men arise, speak-

ing perverse things, to draw away disciples after them,' we are not surprised to learn that such false apostles had plentifully arisen, and that the testing of these had been one great test of the Ephesian church herself. Men abounded there well read and highly educated in the learning of the time, skilled in the Oriental wisdom, having all the old Eastern traditions and speculations concerning things divine wrought out by Grecian culture, and on this grafted that deepest revelation of Christianity given to them by Paul in his Epistle, till they seemed to themselves to have made a better gospel, and to have come by their much learning to the knowledge of new truth. They needed nothing but to be recognised by the church, and they would lead multitudes astray. But the church was firm. Whatever errors had arisen within her pale, *all* her intellectual activity was not misguided. She was a clear-sighted and firm-handed church, a church that knew her position and responsibility, and acted boldly as for her Lord. The false teachers were not suffered to mislead the ardent or the ignorant, not on any plea. They assert they are apostles; they tell the people or insinuate that they are more zealous for the truth than

the recognised teachers, that they are not cold and lifeless as the ordained elders, but can teach deeper things and bring to hand a readier salvation. Well then, says the church, let us bring it to the proof; let us test your claim; shew us now the signs of your apostleship, and we will sit at your feet. Let us sift this gospel you preach; but if it be *another* gospel, then silent in the church *you must be*, for it is to us the charge of this flock has been committed; and as at the peril of our own souls we suffer any of the weakest to be led astray, so we command you to leave them unmolested. This is the unflinching utterance of a church bold in her conviction of the truth; knowing that she is charged of the Lord, and understanding the responsibility of her commission, not to be blinded by any claims to extra grace or power, but believing that she is expected to try all teachers, and straightforwardly acting out her belief. And whether such an example is all unneeded in our own day, no man will find it hard to answer.

But these contests with false teachers had not left the church unharmed. These constant appeals to points of doctrine and discipline had their effect. Always driven back upon her

orthodoxy, she ceased to be the loving church she had at first been. This atmosphere of controversy had been too freezing for the teachers. 'They left their first love:' that ardent attachment with which at first they had embraced the gospel and cleaved to Christ had been chilled. And now the *truth* was becoming more to them than the person of Christ. They had been forced to learn the necessity of clear, enlightened, and well-grounded teaching; and the necessity of loving had been forgotten. Something of self-confidence, something of pride, had been engendered, and gradually had separated them from Christ. Yet there was little outward symptom of decay: as yet the church, though chilled at heart, maintained her purity, her labours, and her patience. There was yet among them, though not the fervent love of the first espousal, a strong regard to the name of Christ; His interests were still the interests of the church; the honour of His cause would be upheld to the death by many a man among them. There was a high church-principle, and something more, still influencing them to much good; each man feeling himself pledged to do his utmost for the Christian community, and maintain a good profession for

the sake of the honour of Christ's name. In labour and in patience, in the active and in the passive virtues of the Christian life, they abounded; in such exhausting labour as required severe effort and stern self-command. Through all these weary years they had seen their views misrepresented, their motives distorted, their influence turned to evil by these false brethren; and yet they would not give up. Though there was no loud and repeating echo to their words, still they would teach; let their enemies do what they would, there would never be lack of service needed for Christ, and that service they would render still. There were men still spell-bound by the magnificent mysteries of the Ephesian goddess: these they would persuade. There were even in the midst of that wealthy city poor to be relieved; dying there as elsewhere, always to be confirmed or instructed.

She was a church this of rare temperament, finely balanced and admirable, who could promptly seize every opportunity of labour, and yet could also patiently wait or endure; with no sluggishness in her, and yet willing to be held in check by her Lord; vigorously and indignantly ejecting evil-doers, and yet meekly suffering when such was her calling. '*Never-*

theless,' says our Lord, 'I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love.' See then the demands of your Lord. Here there was rendered all severity of doctrine and discipline, purity of life and avoidance of the corrupt, abundant labour and untiring patience; and yet there is something beyond all this required. So then, though you could have lived in that church up to its high standard, though there are labours of yours written in the book of God's remembrance, though the name of Christ is in high esteem with you, yet one '*nevertheless*' may ruin all when the lips of your Lord open in judgment. See to it, therefore, that in the midst of your self-congratulation there be no '*nevertheless*' to ruin all; that there be not at the end of all your hard path of duties, alms-deeds, prayers, godly works, and well-sustained trials, this bottomless abyss swallowing and for ever hiding them all. Could anything more ominously reveal that terrible fairness of judgment, that tells us that, after every allowance has been made, truth and right must proceed; that, all being said on the one side, the other must equally be heard.

And how sore is this particular rebuke to every one who is open to it! Christ, who so

loved us, whose love for this world first taught all angels and men what love is and can, and whose love remains the same, unchangeable,—who, having loved His own, loved them unto the end, and who, for all His love, asks only love in return, but does expect that,—He is here obliged, in His very first address to His church, to say, *Thou* hast left thy first love; thou hast not loved me enough; thou hast not loved unto the end. ‘Love is love for evermore,’ increasingly devoted and building itself up unceasingly to a complete and perfect union; but this love had not been so. Inexpressibly sad, because *absolutely causeless*, is such decay of love. Every reason stood, and always does stand, on the other side, urging, pleading for increased love. Would that this first rebuke had never needed repetition! How far it does so now, is not to be answered to any but Him whom it concerns. This is a matter between the Bridegroom and the bride—between Christ and each one of us; to be answered in that privacy from all others to which the presence of Christ does separate the soul. And if there be any joy in fellowship with Him, if any strength, *living eternal* strength, through faith in Him; if any hope of finished joy and glory

through meeting Him and being where He is ; then this possibility of decline in our love for Him who is our all must fill us with anxiety, and lead us to inquire how we may be recovered from such a state.

III. The exhortation of our Lord to this church, and to all in an analogous state, is, *‘Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.’*—Something is to be done with the mind, something with the heart, and something with the hand. For all declension and falling away, here is the cure. Recall distinctly your former state ; do not forget its joys, nor its high purpose and effort, its zeal and its abundant fruit. Remember it, not to call yourself a fool for being righteous overmuch, not to please yourself with the self-complacent reflection that you once had your time of usefulness as others now are having theirs ; but remember it, to recall distinctly to your sense all that you have lost : let its brightness awake you to the darkness of your present, its hopes again gleam through your spirit and enkindle something of the old earnestness, though with a shame that used not to be there. No more bitter command can be laid on a man

than this, 'Remember whence thou art fallen. Why is it that such peculiar pathos gathers round such sentences as these: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!' and, 'Thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell;' but that there is in every one of us an instinctive conviction that we should be advancing, without check, from one degree of blessedness to another, and from one degree of excellence to another? And for this reason, it is a bitter thing to be shamed by comparison, not with another, but with yourself; to remember purposes unaccomplished, hopes unfulfilled and now lost hold of; to be forced to acknowledge that you were further on long ago than now; and to awake to the conviction that the works you long ago proudly gave up were, after all, really the right works. Food enough of remorse it is that we are not what we might have been; but bitterest of all, and quickest of all, and most earnest of all, should be the repentance of those who are not what they once were. So far is this declension from health, that the rule of Paul has to be reversed to suit the diseased condition; instead of forgetting the things that are behind, and which have

long since been eclipsed, you have been losing way, and have now to set before you as your future attainment what once you had passed. Over however long an interval, then, you have to look, in order to find that better period of your life, let the memory do its work till repentance be wrought and urge you to the first works. Probably the Ephesians thought that their first works—burning their magical books and so on—were rather better forgotten, somewhat too enthusiastic and youthful; that they were past that now. Probably, when they did think of them, while there was a suppressed conviction that they were in a more healthy state then, there would be the reflection, ‘We might have kept these books, and found them very useful: we need learning of all kinds, as we now find to our cost; and at all events it was a hasty deed, a very profitless demonstration.’ No, says their Lord, these works, that shewed you had taken your side, and had committed your all to that side,—these first works that gushed fresh from young faith and love, and that would not ask for the control of reason and deliberation, because they were instinctive and irrepressible,—these are the works you should be doing now, and to these

repentance will again lead you as its meet fruits.

Though this condition be undoubtedly common, yet do not take it for granted that it is yours. Especially do not mistake the calmer attachment of riper years for a cooling down from youthful love. Often, though less demonstrative in word, less excited, it is really more intense, more confirmed, and more abundant in good works; just as in commendable human love the first passion of youthful friends is expected to subside, but to leave in its place something better than itself—a strong, and steady, and enlarged affection. Let the works be still the test. Are you doing the first works?

And if you do not need this rebuke as a cure, at least use it as a preventive. Assuredly you will be tempted to relapse. Be thankful if your present feeling prompts you to say, ‘Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;’ but be preparing all the same, for other moods. There may come to you, as there has come to others, the desire to relax after great effort,—temptation to say, Now I need not keep my mind so filled with earnest and serious thoughts; my affections may wander a little now after this strain; these works are very well for a while,’

but I cannot expect to be always so self-sacrificing. Be prepared for such feelings, and then remember this advice of your Lord, and continue you in your first works. Hold on to them as the safe, unmistakeable standard of what is required of you. Can it ever be right to say, 'Fall away; do less; remember the things that are behind, to go back and settle in them'? What would you think were another to say to you, 'You love Christ too much, serve Him too warmly'? And if you say it to yourself, it is only the more dangerous.

IV. In conclusion, notice *the Threat and the Promise*.—The threat is appropriate to her fault. Thou who hast so depended on doctrine and discipline, who hast held so high a church-principle, thou shalt be unchurched. No threat of Heaven is idle; none is made merely for the sake of threatening. This one has fallen on the church and on the city. Where there was once the chief church of the apostolic age, there are now not four souls professing the name of Christ; and where this great city Ephesus once stretched mile after mile of stately buildings, a few huts of mud now lie, and scarcely the ruins of the former magnificence are seen. But while

the threat has been performed, the promise also has doubtless been performed to many a one. Safely may we people the heaven of our expectation with many an Ephesian who heard and held to these words, and by them overcame; many a slave, hard wrought by his idolatrous master, with sore trial laid in his way, wickedly to ensnare him and make all his life difficult, who yet through all had the glorious love of Christ for his comfort, and these words evermore reviving his hope and becoming more and more his own; many a listless and feeble Asiatic woman aroused suddenly to a sense of her individual responsibility and her personal destiny, and with these words, glad and strong within her (changing all her nature, and day by day renewing her life), able to hold forward to the end, bearing all with cheerfulness and labouring with zeal; many a man too, maddened by the violence of his own desires and the luxuriance of temptations all around, sorely tempted to throw himself—body, soul, and spirit—into the alluring world, and imbibe *its* life at every pore, and only preserved by this promise from shaping his life according to his own evil nature, and draining every form of earthly pleasure; but still, through hope of that tree of life, with its

twelve manner of fruits, possessing his soul in patience,—not easily, but fighting hard to the end, and only through daily and severe self-denial, that no man knew of but himself,—passing at last to the paradise of God for evermore. All are there who kept their faith and a good conscience by making this promise their own, remembering in every struggle that the church militant is always becoming the church triumphant, and that every faithful Christian militant becomes the Christian triumphant. These have now overcome: danger to them of falling away is no more; they have entered the paradise of Him who is their God, because the God of their Head. They enjoy all the fulness of God, appropriated for them by Christ, who has claimed the father as his God, that through Him He may also be ours. They have passed to the presence of the Captain of their salvation, not all in fresh and glittering harness, but shewing the dint and stain of conflict, that tell how hard it is to overcome. Nicolaitanes had said throughout to them, Come with us, and give your nature scope: why is there such a fitness between these pleasures we offer and the demands of your own heart, if it is not meant that here and now you are to drink life to the

full? But the words of their Lord held them : ' I will give thee to eat of the tree of *life* ; that full life you cannot have in the world, but must defer till the time of your warfare is accomplished. Only be saved by this hope from the life pressed upon you by evil men, and you shall find life, rich and lasting, in the paradise of your God.' False teachers had said throughout, ' Come with us and taste of the tree of knowledge.' But again came the words of Him whom they could trust, ' *I* alone have power to give, and I will give thee of the tree of life. Knowledge puffeth up, but will not strongly nourish ; it is eating of that tree of knowledge, which at first caused God to banish you, lest you should put forth your hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. Again I will give you entrance to paradise, if only you will believingly wait.'

II.

Smyna.

REV. II. 8-11.

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write ; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive ;

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

IN Ephesus, we were shewn a church with much outward prosperity and much internal strength ; we saw the church a well-organised community, acting with authority and power, with laws clearly ascertained and promptly administered ; able to fight her own battles with the heathen rulers ; winning the regard of the world by her comely outward estate, her munificent deeds, and the learning of her teachers. In Smyrna, we find the church persecuted, crushed, shorn of all beauty, scarcely able to maintain the appearance of a separate society in the eye of the world. Any adherent of the Ephesian church, going down to Smyrna, would find that different graces were needed there. If he had been induced to join the former community merely through admiration of the eloquent and convincing reasoning of her teachers, or through a somewhat laudable

ambition to share in her works of usefulness, he would be much surprised, and probably discouraged, by the different state of things in Smyrna. Here the kiss of salutation and fellowship was given him by lips which much suffering had closed with a firmer set. The letters of commendation, written for him by the successful churchmen of Ephesus, were opened by hands hardened and stained with ill-requited toil; and, on inquiring for the Christian place of meeting, he would be led to the unfrequented part of the city, and introduced to no stately edifice.

Such a change may have operated beneficially on some of those who in Ephesus had been chargeable with having left their first love. For in the church of Smyrna there was little to choose but Christ only. And on becoming connected with it, a man would be thrown back upon his real motive in joining a church at all, and be awakened to indignation against himself that he had been seeking for something more than Christ, or, to speak more truly, something less than Christ, in attaching himself to the Ephesian community. Such an experience has many a one to pass through. Advantage after advantage, that first made the

profession of Christ's name interesting and desirable, is taken away, until Christ and his benefits are left simple and separate, and a man learns what kind of faith his has been : whether the church, and all the church gives and has,—church teachers, interesting truth, useful works, respectable station, and commendable character,—whether all these have been nothing to him in comparison to Christ,—whether Christ has been in them all their attraction. The man who begins at Ephesus is often, after a while, brought down to Smyrna, and learns, in much tribulation, that active and respected living is not the foundation of the Christian character ; that, when all church activity, and almost church life is quenched, there may still remain the essence of the Christian character—faithful adherence to Jesus Christ ; and that for learning this, there is no school like that of affliction. Humbled, he sees the grace of Christ in sustaining him ; stripped of gifts, the person of the Giver stands out more distinctly in its own intrinsic worth and unchangeable glory. And as we may well believe that many a wise Christian parent of these early times would tell his children of this suffering church, that their hearts might be

prepared against a day of trial; and as we know that written accounts of the constancy of this church were circulated for the confirmation of others; so may we, by the consideration of its case, catch something of its spirit, and be helped, in our easier circumstances, to maintain that fidelity unto death, which is no less our calling than that of the faithful in Smyrna.

Lying about forty miles to the north of Ephesus, Smyrna has been from remote antiquity, and continues no less to be still, one of the most populous and thriving cities of the land. The ancients who came trading by land and sea, struck with the advantages of the position, and the care with which these had been used, named this city the 'Glory of Asia.' Her own name, Smyrna (meaning myrrh), was not less significant,—telling boastfully of the fragrance which her wealth and reputation shed through all the trading world; telling now to us, still more significantly, of the bitter myrrh-like discipline by which she proved these Christian citizens. It was in such a city that this poor church had to bear her burden and reproach. To be poor among the poor, would have been no such severe trial; but to be poor among the rich, and among men who esteem

all things by their money value, is quite another matter. The form of persecution most common in this city, was such heavy fining as deprived the Christians of all their worldly possessions, and such branding of them as would effectually prevent the most industrious from again rising in the world. In a city redolent of thought like Ephesus, the doctrines of Christianity would with many receive a fair and interested hearing; in the hurry and eager business of Smyrna, every sentiment that seemed to slight wealth would be at once condemned. The Christians there would soon be stamped as enthusiasts, and kept as separate as possible from those whose worldly policy was so different from theirs. Unless this poverty had been unexpected, it would scarcely have been mentioned here; and that it is so mentioned, bids us at once picture a church composed not only of poor men, but of ruined men. Many among them, having enjoyed opulence and station, gave up this for the reproach of Christ's name. And now they were daily carrying this cross: seeing on the streets the insolent and contemptuous glance of former friends; hearing the jibes and taunts, spoken loud enough for their ear; and seeking diffi-

cult and precarious livelihood on those quays where once they had seen their own wealth lading and landed. And they had themselves been of this city, and not of another; they had themselves eagerly grasped the world, had known the excitements of large ventures, and entertained hopes of affluence and ease at last. They, too, had been brought up to value a man by what he could earn; and they, too, had learnt to despise and condemn poverty. And often must these former feelings have risen up again within them, more loudly than ever asserting whatever truth there was in them,—asserting that a man's earnings do, in a rough way and as a general rule, represent his value to his neighbours; that every man ought to provide for his family; that all their influence was lost with their wealth, and whatever else could make their present poverty bitter through the remembrance of former riches. And let us bear in mind, what to many among them would be as sore a part of their poverty as any, that they would now have scarcely any opportunity of disseminating the views they felt so worthy of universal reception. Nothing more generally evidences the vigour of the early church than her desire to propagate the truth. That

God had dwelt on earth a few miles from themselves ; that now He was gone before them, to watch over and bring them to himself ; that immortality and glory were offered to the feeblest and worst of heathen,—these truths were then too fresh and living to be buried in a man's own breast—too full of joy to be all enjoyed by himself. The Christians of Smyrna knew what they had received in giving up all for Christ,—they knew at least that all worldly possessions and hopes were as nothing compared to Him ; they could leave all the future a blank, emptying it of all the dreams of youth and the resolve of their manhood, and enter it with Christ. They knew the value of Christ, not as we know it, but as men who had to act on their estimate. And as they saw their former associates, and men of influence from other lands, blind to *the truth*, did not that poverty, which separated them, and made them contemptible and unheard by these others, become a harder and harder bond ?

But not only was their poverty aggravated by their former wealth and opinions ; not only as they walked in poor raiment to their work, did they see prosperous men, once their friends,

and richly ornamented houses that had once been their homes, but now knew them no more; not only had they to shun the presence of the destitute, whom they had formerly aided and relieved, now themselves experiencing the pitiableness of the condition they had once pitied in others; not only had they to limit and restrict their expenditure, and hourly to be reminded, by privation and shame, of all they had lost, and to suffer more acutely than all from that inability to influence in the highest matters those who were once willingly advised and guided by them; but the whole strain of this rested on the one feeling of fidelity to Christ. They had brought themselves deliberately to this condition for Christ's sake. It *could* have been helped, and still it could be helped. It was open to them any day to throw a handful of incense before the image of the Emperor, and they would be at once restored, from all the ban under which they lay, to the society whose esteem and privileges they had formerly enjoyed. And on many of them, sometimes through kindness, sometimes through simple malice of torment, this offer was officiously pressed. Any day, when poverty was felt more than usually bare and cold, some

officious tempter might present himself, inviting them to respectability and comfort by a short and apparently easy path. Every day, as their tribulation increased,—as they saw children or parents lodged in the dungeons, or barbarously scourged in the market-place, or exposed to wild beasts in the amphitheatre,—constantly arose the question, ‘Is Christ worth all this? Are these the great things He promised? Was the world not kinder?’ And constantly did they suppress and stifle all such questioning; remembering his own words: ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’ And thus, instead of being moved away from their faith, they were wrought to a more persistent and determined choice of Christ,—pressed to a closer attachment by all this outward tribulation. They added to their first love all the intensity of love tried and approved,—pledged now not only by word but by suffering; Christ becoming more and more precious the more they gave up for Him, standing forth singly as the sufficient and complete portion that remains and fills the void that every loss has made,—the pearl of great price, for which a man will give all that he has.

And shall not this example confirm us in our choice, thankful that no such fiery trial rages among us ; but taking note here, in the case of others, how kingly and unassailable a position the faithful Christian's is, and how absolutely trustworthy, for all persons and emergencies, is Jesus Christ. Would some have success in life first before yielding to Christ? Would you first secure that respectable position and competence you have set your heart on? Bear in mind that you may now possess yourself of what is far more valuable—of what is substantial enough to weigh against worldly goods, and which, when so weighed, outweighs all. You may have at once far more than you laboriously seek. You may have what these men gave up their all that they might keep.

One feature more of this church must be considered. They were exposed to the tormenting persecution of the Jews, the wildest of all persecutors. Now that the Holy City was destroyed, and themselves more than ever scattered through the world; now that they began to suspect that the Christians might be right,—that the Messiah had come, and that they had slain Him,—they were maddened by everything that seemed to witness to their error and guilt.

Their blasphemy was peculiarly sore to men who were giving up all for Jesus Christ. 'Believe,' they said, 'in Him whom our rulers crucified! choose Him as your king whom *we* thought less worthy to be chosen than a robber! trust in the help of one who was helpless on the cross, and whose disciples have forged a lie that He rose from the dead!'—was it an easy thing for these men, who had till lately been heathen and alien from God, to hear these things from God's own people? They knew that to the Jews had been committed the oracles of God; that to them had come the promise. Might they not be right after all? When they were daily told, and told by those who had best reason to know, that there was really no call in the world for their suffering as they were doing; that their tribulation was wholly ultronous and unreasonable, and would be wholly without reward; that it was vain to believe in a man who had been put to death as a malefactor, who was now beyond all help himself, and could not think of or help others,—surely this epistle must have come most opportunely and gratefully; and what a flood of relief and joy must have lifted up their souls, as they triumphantly read in its very first words, 'I

am the first and the last, who was dead, and am alive !’

As in the epistle to Ephesus we found that the title assumed by our Lord was a fit introduction, at once to the whole series and to the first epistle; so here the fitness of the title to the church addressed need scarcely be dwelt upon. The church that is passing through the valley of humiliation and the shadow of death, is encouraged by the voice of Him who was dead and is alive. To take this title and count out all its fulness, is as impossible as it is for the need of any human heart to exhaust the fulness of Christ. The sum of the meaning is, that through all the changes in the world and in yourselves, there remains one unaltered and untouched by any of them, ‘the first and the last,’ who is unchangeable, and whose years have no end. And together with this is linked that other truth, that He who thus existed from eternity to eternity, the unchangeable, untouched by all the vicissitudes that bring man to the verge of dissolution, did, through love of man, submit Himself to the greatest of all changes, the change of death. This title, then, first of all bids us remember, that beyond all our experience of Christ there lies a rich

fulness, so that to be 'in Him' is to be embraced on all sides by complete blessedness, abundance, and security. He is 'the first and the last,' not as the Jews would have made Him out, only a man despised and executed, but the beginning of all things: the *first*, without whom nothing would have been; the *last*, towards whom all things are proceeding, as their glory and their Judge. This title, it is to be observed, expresses his eternal existence, not absolutely, but as in connection with all He has made,—with us and all we have to do with. He says not 'I am from eternity,' but 'I am first,' reminding us of all that follows. He says not 'I am to eternity,' but 'I am the last,' shewing His connection with all that passes now in time. He names Himself from the world, so to speak; as if He were standing in the church at Smyrna, looking before and after, through all her trials and all the changes and occurrences of time; and from this point of view He names Himself. Before all these things which terrify you, all those so fearful events that they shut out all memory of what went before them, I am,—for from me are all things. Through all these things that shall come upon you, and after them all, you shall

find me, and find me *your* Judge and Rewarder, as also of your enemies,—for to me are all things.

Under this designation would our Lord be known by that church, against which the might of the world and the powers of darkness were rising; presenting himself as the everlasting Rock of Ages, against which the wear and tumult of time may beat, but which stands the same after every change; which remains after every bereavement, in which there is evermore a refuge and security against all that the creature can do. All that rises in its pride against his friends, receives still its being from Him, strength or weakness, continuance or dissolution, as He sees fit,—for He is the first. Never will the time come when the faithful may despair, or when the enemies of Christ may rise and triumph in strength of their own,—for He is the last. Make therefore yours this everlasting constancy of Christ, which tenderly embraces your life in his eternity. Remember this, all ye who are *in Christ*, folded in eternal refuge; and all ye who are content to take your chance among the waves of time, tossed from one hope to another, now raised high and seeing far before you, now sunk in the

abyss and trough of disconsolateness, and waiting still for the next change of lot, finding no stability in yourselves and no constancy in the world on which you can count. Christ reveals Himself to all; and with these words would He comfort the heart of every desolate or troubled soul, stablishing in His own eternal sameness all that waver, and warning all that do not own Him. What better thing could the church of Smyrna learn, or what better thing can we learn, than this, that through all changes in the world, and all changes in ourselves, Christ remains the same; that when this calamity, this disease, this terrible and perplexing state of mind, has wrought all its woe and spent all its force, we shall find Christ at the end of it,—that it cannot get beyond Him and leave Him baffled, carrying us out of His reach for ever?

But why are we sure that this unchangeable and steadfast One will be *to us* all that He is; and how are we sure of His sympathy if He is so above all change? Because He is not only the first and the last, but He was dead and is alive. Do you demand proof of Christ's power to sympathise with you? Here it is; He has passed through a greater human trial than you

have yet passed,—He has died. Do you ask for proof of His willingness to sympathise,—of his real sympathy? Neither is this far to seek. He, the Eternal, subjected Himself to the conditions of time, counted out by days and hours a human lifetime. He, the life of creation, by the outgoing of whose power all is evermore upheld and renewed, became dead. He who is the first was born; He who is the last, ended a life. ‘He was dead, and is alive!’ He who is alive is the same who was dead, with the same human-heartedness and unmistakeable love. Name the sacrifice *He* will not make for you, who has given Himself for you. Name the difficulty He cannot overcome, who has become man to save you. Name the power He cannot conquer, who vanquished death and burst the grave. Can He not see and love you through affliction, who saw and loved you through sin? Can anything separate you from that love which pressed to you across the whole distance between the unchangeable Eternal and a dead Christ?

Already, then, in the very title under which our Lord addresses His suffering faithful, is there a great depth of consolation; and each word of the epistle adds to it. ‘I know thy

works.' Smyrna finds no place in the records of the apostolic journeys, but the memory and recognition of Christ is of wider volume. And in this recognition is all needed support in suffering. It was not because their Lord was absent or forgetful that they were left to struggle on. In temptations, in prisons, in mockings and scourgings, He was with them; suffering along with them; often most sensibly 'coming' to them and for them in cruel deaths. And as the death of His saints is precious in His sight, so doubtless, in its degree, is each measure of your tribulation. Only beware of that morbid craving for petty martyrdom which, from the first, has been the snare of many dispositions,—that officious self-sacrificing for friends or for Christ which is uncalled for and obtrusive; a desire to exhibit grief; an undue exposure of what *I* am suffering for Christ; an unseemly proclamation, by little hints and actions, that *I* have been tried above other men. Only give some people the credit of suffering, and they will suffer to almost any amount. Indeed, so deeply founded in our natures is this feeling, and to such lengths will it go, that the members of this model of a persecuted church had to be expressly admonished

by their venerable ruler not to give themselves up to martyrdom—to flee from persecution when flight was possible.

Again, we are to take warning against the temptation to reckon suffering, merely as suffering, a virtuous thing. It is not all affliction that is affliction for Christ; neither is it all affliction that leaves us better than it found us. To this suffering church the Lord said, ‘Thou art poor, *nevertheless* thou art rich.’ Is this so with you? Or can your Lord say, ‘I know thy poverty, but also thy murmuring, thy discontent, thy meanness, thy covetousness’? Has your poverty wrought inwards to your spirit and made it also poor? Has the bitterness of your outward lot, whatever it be, wrought inwards and soured your spirit? Has the hardness of your trial made you callous and indifferent—hard towards your neighbour and distant towards your God?

Again, many of you will probably feel a rebuke in those words, which assure you that trial has a limit assigned by your Lord. They at first, and indeed throughout, bring comfort. The Lord tells you that He sees your tribulation, knows all its painful ingredients, but does not on that account always put an end to it.

It is a comfort, it is *enough* to know that He requires fidelity, and that He knows how long yours shall be tried—can say whether it is for ten or twenty days. He does not *reveal* to Smyrna *how* long she would be in such straits ; but He reminds her that He knows how long the time is, that it is a definite time which has an end. This is all for true consolation, and all the rather does it humble and rebuke us. Can we but reply to these comforting words, ‘ Lord, Thou tellest me to be faithful unto death, but I have not been faithful unto a great deal less. A little annoyance has often been enough to turn me aside ; a slight disappointment has clouded my brow, and turned my praise into a sneer, my prayer into murmuring. And how short has been my patience ! how have I fretted and clamoured in my heart, ‘ How long, O Lord, how long ? ’ as if Thou hadst forgotten Thy redeemed, or wert not pained in Thy suffering member ; as if the time were not fixed for my release and known to Thee ! ’

To all of us our Lord could as distinctly reveal the future as He did to these persecuted Christians ; to some among us He might reveal a future full of strange events, of unlooked-for change, of desolating calamity. In any earthly

future these things are possible. To all of us, the short ten-day future of our earthly life is, when looked at from our point of view, a time of fearful hazard, wherein we may win eternal glory or prepare eternal shame.

And what is to be our guide through the difficulties that thicken on our path? what is to be the light to our feet as we go forward into that thick, heavy darkness? what is to be the strength of our souls and their firmness as we advance into the land of uncertainties, and pass through among dangers we know not? These words of our Redeemer: 'Fear *none* of those things which thou shalt suffer: be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' Let these words haunt your hearts, till they fill you with the strong expectation of the approval of your Lord.

He does not utter these words carelessly, as one who does not know how you stand shuddering on the edge of pain or loss. While He says this, His eye is resting lovingly on those whom He sees attaining, and over whose heads He already hangs the crown of life. He does not promise carelessly, not seeing how it is to be fulfilled. He offers you life such as it is worth while to suffer and die for; and He offers you

this, foreseeing all that could possibly assail or interrupt that life; having in view that second death, and all its power to perpetuate whatever is evil in the first. He offers this to *you* because *you* need it. For, be assured, my friends, that this is your concern as well; that your life is as solemn a thing for you, and bears in it a hazard as momentous to you, as that of any tormented to the death. You also will one day be called on to deliver yourself into the power of the first death, whose horror is that it *may* hand over to the second. And from whom are you to receive life, if not from Him who here offers it? Cast loose, then, without fear and doubting, from all other hope, from all fearful concern about the future. Things which do in it so nearly and wholly concern you as this second death He cares for. And be it yours not to inquire how much He will demand of you, but faithfully to discharge what lies before you now. And bear in mind, that in this life, untried as you may seem when compared with these martyrs, you have opportunity of shewing a fidelity to Christ which nowhere else you can shew. Here you may bear a testimony to His power and purity and kingliness and love to rule you, which you will

not be able to bear anywhere else, but in these simple actions and words with which you are now building up your life.



III.

Pergamos.

REV. II. 12-17.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write ; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges :

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

Repent ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

THERE are two means by which the influence of the church may be defeated, her distinctions obliterated, and her existence endangered. The one is persecution, the other amalgamation. The world may destroy the church by slaying its members, or by making them worldlings. In Ephesus, neither the one nor the other could take effect. The church there stood upon her prerogatives, was too proud to compromise with the world, and too powerful to be crushed by persecution. In Smyrna, the world assailed the bulwarks of the church by persecution, and in Pergamos, sapped them by seducing doctrine and example. And, as we found, that in passing from Ephesus to Smyrna, our Lord indicated a very common path in Christian experience, so, in taking up the epistle to Pergamos after that to Smyrna, one cannot but reflect, that in this succession also, there

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is indicated an order which is frequently followed in the case of the individual. Individuals learn that after the world has tried the Christian with its frown, it more severely tries him with its smile. Do you wonder that this same truth should so often present itself as you read the Bible? Does it not equally present itself as you read the world? Have you not seen men who have clung despairingly to the rock of their salvation, when all the billows of adversity broke over them, relaxing their grasp, and losing their footing as the gentle tide of prosperity washes quietly and smilingly around them, and lifts them on its placid bosom? It is natural for the world to try harshness first. In the order of time, most Christians have first to meet some measure of persecution; they are sure to find more or less of this in taking up their ground, in settling to their position. Then, after your position is known and acknowledged, after your character for being a Christian is recognised, the conduct of others towards you changes. Those who used to scoff now seem to inquire, are ready to meet you half way, will put up with a great many of what they call your notions, if you will only go in with some of their customs.

They seem to think it a fair thing, and possibly they may make you think it a fair thing, that as they yield a good deal to you, you should yield a good deal to them. If they no longer smile at, but decently put up with some of your practices, they think they have fairly won your approval of theirs. They will shew themselves of the same mind with you, that, in truth, you may become of the same mind with them. Every one knows that when thus acted towards, we are in a very difficult position. It is disagreeable to seem ungracious to those who seem so courteous to us. It is painful to take up a higher position, and be obliged to say that we are aiming at a higher life than they. Besides that the ways of the world are naturally our own ways, and that they are pleasant to us, there is pain in severing ourselves from those who follow these ways; in living through the world with the consciousness always pressed upon us that there *is*,—hide it as we may, forget it as we may,—an essential difference between us and many we love,—that these names, ‘the world,’ and ‘the church,’ are not names only,—that there is a line, seen by the eye of God always, and often painfully visible even to us, dividing (really and essentially

dividing) men into two parties, running through nations, through cities, *through families*, cutting like a sword, or blasting, as the flash of heaven's lightning, the bond that draws heart to heart. You would that you and your friend were at one on everything; you begin to reconsider your position, to give up little by little, step by step to draw nearer to him. You think you will commend to him your religious profession by shewing its liberality and liberty of spirit, its freedom from moroseness and superstition and cant. A natural delicacy forbids you to exhibit the Christian peculiarities; the sharp distinctions of your calling are rounded off. And have you then acted kindly towards that other person? Have you not just misinformed him as to the true relation in which you stand to one another, and kept him at a distance from the truth, adding to the rapidity and heaviness of his fall all the weight of your influence? Still, so powerfully does natural affection and love of the good will of one another draw us, that on no feeling will Satan more readily rest the chance of his success in drawing a man from strict adherence to the faith he has professed.

So it was in Pergamos. Satan's seat was

there. In this city all the arts on which he most depends for our destruction were put forth, and here we find that the temptation of the church was to become conformed to the world. Very probably Satan's rule in this city had been manifested in many another way. Certainly persecution had been tried in this city as well as in Smyrna. But the persecution which had begun here was over. Either it had not produced the expected effects, as very seldom it did, or it had only been devised as a temporary expedient to subserve the more effectual temptation to follow, to give the church an appetite for peace, by giving her first to taste the bitterness of death. That the persecution had been short, may be gathered not only from the days of it being already spoken of as past, but also because only one martyr is mentioned.

The condition of the church in Pergamos is distinct and easily understood. In this city the Roman governor of the district held his court. The members of the church were, many of them, in the service of the government, exhibiting the fidelity, high integrity, and industry of the new life in important civil offices; mixing continually with men of the highest rank and

influence in the empire, and themselves brought up to all forms of refined and courteous demeanour; trained to a delicate consideration for the feelings of others, and accustomed to hold in abeyance all opinions which could give offence; men also, who, from their earliest consciousness, had been taught to bow before the supremacy of the law and religion of Rome, and to identify themselves with the interests of the state; who had scarcely recognised any personal responsibility until called by God out from among other men; who had looked on themselves much as a part of a great system, until forced to attach themselves one by one to Christ; who, until they were brought to this great act of faith, wherein a man stands alone with Christ, and must act by himself and for himself, and thenceforward has a connection which cannot be interfered with nor burst by any accident or power, by any change or chance, —a connection whereby he himself, as a man, independently of every relation he may sustain to other men, or systems, or societies, obtains a hold for himself, a life for himself, a duty for himself, a God for himself, and that eternally, —until they came to this act of faith, they had been merely servants of an earthly kingdom,

their persons devoted to it as their hopes were bounded by it. In short, they had been Roman citizens, and now they were Christians.*

And now, what was to be their course? Were they no longer to name Cæsar as their ruler, having believed in the name of Christ? Were they to throw up whatever offices they held, and renounce the service of any king but Jesus? No, certainly; at once they saw so far. If called upon to pay divine orders to their earthly monarch, then their Antipas was ready to stand forth and suffer death rather than seem to dishonour the name of Christ, or put any in competition with Him. And so evidently was this the general tone and mind of the whole church, that such tests were soon discontinued. The path of Christian duty was there clear; the reality of Christian faith in following that path was too strikingly revealed to serve Satan's purpose. But other modes of seduction were at hand. There were public banquets served in the temples of the idols; and there were private banquets where meat, which had first been presented at the heathen altar, was served to the guests. The Christians might maintain their own worship at home,

* See Trench *in loc.*

might even worship Christ in spirit at these heathen tables, might see only a stock or a stone, 'an article of furniture,' where a pagan saw a god; but was he to eat within the temple, or was he to eat the meat that had been offered to an idol? No; for though he knew there was no more in these idols than in any other piece of stone or gold; though he knew there was no difference between the meat offered to him at a heathen banquet and any other meat; though he knew there was in itself no compromising of his faith by being so far a partaker with the heathen, yet the heathen judged it to be a compromise,—thought it a victory over a Christian to make him so eat,—and for this very reason invited him to eat, and therefore the Christian would refuse, would not suffer the heathen to think he held his faith lightly, or that it was all one how a Christian acted, supposing he professed the name of Christ. All that the heathen wanted was to bring the Christian to a life similar to their own. It made no matter to them what faith they had, what name they grasped in their hearts as their treasure, so long as they could induce them to join with themselves in the ordinary actions of life. You may easily fancy

how a subtle heathen would persuade a Christian to give in to such actions. 'You cannot,' he would say, 'do Christ any dishonour by coming with us; it is merely to bow to that image, which to you means nothing in the world, your heart may meanwhile bow to your true Lord; but only conform in these quite external actions, and you will thus win the good will of the people, and put an end to all murmurs against you as unfit for your office!' And with many such reasonings prevailed, and from eating of meat offered to idols, they had gone on following the heathen to the grossest sins.

Is there any one who fails to see in this state of matters the image of our own condition? A church in which there were many thorough and straightforward Christians holding Christ's name, and living as faith in Him led them, together with many of most ignorant views and corrupt lives. Is there no such temptation met by you as was presented to these believers? And who are they that tempt you, who compose 'the world?' Is it not very largely, almost wholly, made up of men who, far from denying the faith you profess, have themselves professed it, who have been, like you, baptized

into the name of Christ, and have partaken of the communion of His body and blood? It is quite a right thing, and a highly proper thing, every one admits, to take the name of Christ, to be a Christian, but is that to shut you out from society? is that to prevent you from making use of those means of advancement used by all? is that to bring any loss upon you—loss of pleasant companionship, of pleasure, of means, of affection or reputation? You are told, are you not, that there is a certain amount of faith that is a very good thing, but that it very easily grows to fanaticism or extravagance? Is it not virtually said to you by the whole course of the world, by the palpable and manifest fashion of the world, and by what it requires from you in your place, that to believe in Christ is very well so long as that belief is a mere internal act (that is, so long as it is a mere pretence, and nothing), but that it really will not do to live to Christ? The world is just as anxious as ever it was that the church should be like itself; just as much as ever scorns the idea of an entire surrender to Jesus Christ. Satan has not yielded his throne; nor is he content now, any more than before, to have it established only in the dark places of the earth.

And if from that throne he can rule your actions, he cares not what you profess. He will encourage you in that 'kind of faith which produces no fidelity.' Your danger is, that you are allowed to think highly of Christ—to worship Him—to admire His fitness to be your Saviour. Were the world to forbid you this, were your fellow-worshippers to tell you it was foolish to hold Christ's name dear, you would need no further warning; but, allowed in all this, you are constantly besought to do things inconsistent—besought by men whom you desire to please, whom you must suppose to be as well instructed, and whom you have been accustomed to consider as sincere as yourselves.

And if you ask how you are to be saved from being gradually moved away from the Christ-approved course of life; if you really desire above all things to walk consistently before Him, then seek to know Him as 'Him that has the sharp two-edged sword;' that is, continually refresh your memory with this powerful symbol that so vividly sets forth the right and the power of Christ to judge. He bears *the* sword; with Him rests the supreme fountain of all lawful authority. He can dethrone Satan when He will. He will destroy him, and with

him all your enemies. His is the sword wherewith all that is evil shall be separated from all that is good,—the sharp two-edged sword of swift, sure, sheer justice,—the sword which shall at last disentangle the subtlest interweaving of truth and falsehood in the church and in the individual, which shall as with one stroke sever all false professors from those who in truth hold His name. And this sword, we read, ‘goeth out of His mouth.’ As this same Balaam was first rebuked by the word of the Lord at the mouth of the beast he rode, and then was threatened with the sword of the angel in his path, so that same justice, which shall thoroughly sift and separate all unrighteous ways and fashions, and for ever destroy them in the end, is now among us laid down in the written word as a code of justice for our guidance, and by which we may destroy the evil in ourselves that mingles with and infects the good. ‘For the *word* of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.’ Is not this the very instrument you need, to preserve you from all false ideas

of sin and duty, all false rules of life that have grown strong with the habits of your life, and are as closely bound up with your nature as the marrow lives within and cleaves to your bones? What else is able to sever from you the evil without harming the good, to enable you to reject false intents and motives, and live a balanced life—balanced between courage and delicacy—rendering to others all due deference, but acting still independently as Christ guides; letting no *false* delicacy prevent you from professing in your conduct the name of Christ, but neither, on the other hand, forcing an unnatural and formal confession; never being backward, honestly and candidly, to shew that you desire Christ to rule you in all things, to be the supreme name to you, and yet never being self-confidently, ambitiously, and offensively forward to obtrude unnecessarily your peculiar standard of duty; never mistaking sanctimoniousness for sanctity, nor indifference to the opinion of others for firm adherence to the truth in Christ? And who is sufficient for these things? Not certainly the man that thinks his own wisdom and knowledge of the world a sufficient guide, but he who fears lest his knowledge of the world may betray him,—

lest his appreciation of what is good in men, and his natural, even his Christian love of them may blind him to their errors,—lest his modesty should prove traitor, and betray him into a selfish and easy non-interference, and hiding of his light, and who therefore prays, ‘Lord, lead me in thy way, by the light of thy truth; sanctify me by thy truth, thy word is truth.’

With our Lord’s command to this church to repent, there is coupled the assurance that He was mindful of their position, and how difficult it was to live a spotless Christian life in the city of Pergamos. ‘I know,’ He says, ‘where thou dwellest;’ and again, He speaks of their dwelling-place as being that of Satan. He knew how they were daily exposed to temptation; yet it was in that city He had called them to holiness, and in that city He would have them live holy lives. He does not tell them that because their temptations were so many and so sore, therefore He would not enter into judgment with them; that because they were more tempted than other men, therefore they might sin more than others. Should we become more lax, or should we not be girt with a stricter carefulness, did we remember that our Lord

knows our temptations? Surely these words, 'I know where thou dwellest,' are powerful to reanimate our fainting spirits, and keep us from wearying in well-doing! Is it nothing that your lively and painful sense of the hardness of your position is accompanied by Christ's lively knowledge of the same; that the ungodliness of the age, of the neighbourhood, of the business you are in, is known to Him, while felt by you? He knows you in connection with all that; not as a separate soul, but as a man living where you are living. You are what you are, very much because you are in the place you are, and thus Christ judges you, and for you thus situated He is the helper. You are known by Him not only in some striking periods of your religious experience,—remembered by Him not only as you kneel in prayer or come before Him in His house,—but in the business where your mind is wholly absorbed by the cares of this life. He knows that it is not as easy for you to act a Christian part among all those with whom you have to deal, as it is for you to pray among your fellow-worshippers. He knows how your time is demanded by the world, and how your Christian resolves are hindered by the world, and how

your high Christian hopes are mocked and often crushed by the petty labours in which you have hourly to engage. . He knows the insignificance or the responsibility of your life, and knows what makes up either. He knows its dreary routine or its multifarious demands; He knows the seduction of its society or the temptation of its solitude.

It is to men whose actual position in the world He thus thoroughly holds in view, that the promises of 'the hidden manna' and 'the stone with the new name written thereon' are made. Let us not, then, think them unpractical. They are, doubtless, not fully intelligible in this life, nor to be fully enjoyed in this life; yet, presented to us under symbols which are of this world, and being intended for men wearied by conflict with this world, they do, when examined and received, afford us refreshment and satisfaction. Both are given in opposition to what the world was offering to the Christians of Pergamos. Daily besought to fall in with the world's ways, and, while they lasted, to enjoy the palpable, visible, present advantages and pleasures of the world, Christ says to them, 'I will give thee the hidden manna.' Threatened with the loss of 'that dear

name of Roman citizen,' and of whatever title the governor's favour had conferred, Christ opposes His promise: 'I will give thee a new name.'

And if one may speak of the artistic beauty of these epistles,—of that truth to fact, and pervading truthfulness in dealing with fact, which runs through them all, and makes each part consistent with every other,—there is here a striking instance of this. For, having compared the sin of this church to the sin of the Israelites in the wilderness, and having threatened the church in words that recalled the wilderness-state of the Israelites, and how they were rebuked through the rebuke of Balaam at the mouth of the ass; so now is the promise also given under a symbol which recalls the wilderness. It is as if He said: 'Your enemies no longer persecute you, their fear is upon you no longer, and now you desire to go back to the flesh-pots of Egypt! You do not relish the discipline of my separate people, but would risk the dangers, if so be you may share the pleasures of the world. But be not afraid that, though you do not enjoy what the nations enjoy, you will therefore be joyless and lifeless. The hidden manna is yours; it is

with your Father in heaven, and will be given in the time of your need. It is hidden; you cannot provide it for yourselves; but it is yours.' And so, if we will only receive the promise, our life also is hid with Christ in God. Christ is this manna—not seen by the world, but given to all who depend on Him. Are you cut off, by the simple following of what you see to be duty, from much that nature sighs for? then do not yet faint, the world is *not* your life, nor anything the world can do for you.

The stone given to the overcomer has in itself no significance; it is merely the medium of the inscription. It is white, as being the colour of victory; and on this stone is written a name which no man knoweth save him that receiveth it. Here, then, is a personal transaction between the victor and Christ. The manna was a common gift; but the specialty of this gift is that it is individual. *Each* man receives at Christ's hand a separate token of victory; and as if this were not enough, there is inscribed on this a name, which is known only to Christ and that single soul. It is not that Christ takes indiscriminately, as from a heap, and gives the first that comes to the first comer; there is a specially prepared reward

for each, that would be a reward for no one else. Corresponding to each believer now striving forwards through this life, there is a reward above, which none will receive but those for whom it is made ready. This is yours also, if you will receive it; and what surer pledge, what more absolute token could there be of the personal affection of Him who is highest and best? You desire a separate friendship,—not a common, but a special and individual connection with Christ; you have an experience peculiar to yourself, gradually unfolding within you, and at each step of it you are brought alone to deal with Christ; your severest temptations must be met in privacy from all others, your most earnest purposes must be formed before Christ only, and you seek, therefore, to have some special recognition of you by Christ,—that He reveal Himself to you as an individual, and not only in common with all sinners,—that He exercise towards you a loving-kindness adapted to yourself, and a treatment suitable to your condition. There are secrets between you and Him, if you be a true Christian,—the secrets of your life. It is useless to compare the nearness and power of this friendship with any other, to ask you to remember

how a secret known separates two persons from the largest and friendliest company, and binds them together in an inner sphere of affection. The secrets which you have delivered to Christ are such as you could not think in presence of a fellow-man, nor dream of breathing to your dearest friend. These Christ knows and has regard to; and as a pledge that the inmost necessities of your soul are understood and sympathised with, that the whole past history of your life has been appreciated, He will give you this secret name of His. As you have revealed yourself to Him as you would do to no other, so He will reveal Himself to you as He would to no other. That secret name of His which *you* shall receive, none other shall. It would be meaningless to every other. But to you it will be full of meaning. It will reveal Christ as connected with you; will reflect in His character of Saviour all your past history as a sinner; will unfold to you how you were followed and known in every step of your course, and how every thought of your heart was received by Him, and will thus give you also eternal assurance of His love and saving power. So that, if you will allow the expression,—and may you reverently ponder it,—in

all that great company there will be none other of whom with such truth you can say, 'We understand one another.' And he who receives this promise, let the world do its best or its worst,—let it offer its highest title or threaten the destruction of the man's own name,—he will stand fast, still hold the name of Christ, and still be very glad in the hope of holding at Christ's hand this white stone, and reading thereon the new name, which no man shall know but himself only.



IV.

Thyatira.

REV. II. 18-29.

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write ; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass ;

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works ; and the last to be more than the first.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezabel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication ; and she repented not.

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

And I will kill her children with death ; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts ; and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira (as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak), I will put upon you none other burden :

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations :

And he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers ; even as I received of my Father.

And I will give him the morning star.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

HAD our Lord been visible in the body as the Superintendent of the churches, and had He followed the customary route of a traveller from Pergamos, the third church, to Sardis, the fifth, He would have passed close by the city of Thyatira. And as in all things our Lord exhibits Himself as one that is well acquainted with the actual condition and appearances of this earth, so here, as if He were one of ourselves on a journey, He passes from Pergamos to Thyatira. And as His searching eye saw at once the distinctive characters of the other churches, and directed His epistle pointedly to each, so that the rebuke of one would have been unjust to another, and the promise given as the hope and hold of one would have been less valuable to another, so here in Thyatira He unfolds, by His rebuke and commendation, by His exhortation and

threatening, by His promise, and not least by the title He assumes, a distinctly marked phase of Christian life. The condition of Thyatira is the exact converse of that of Pergamos. In both the world and the church are amalgamating—are too closely allied. But in Pergamos the world was the aggressor; in Thyatira it is the church that acts the aggressive part. She attempts to deceive the world, and rule in the world; and in order to effect this with less trouble, she lowers her morality to the world's level, and arrogates powers to which she has no claim. She strives to embrace the world, and to include in herself all the characteristics of the world.

Of facts concerning the church in Thyatira, beyond what are implied in this epistle, there are absolutely none. In lieu of better information, some have drawn upon their own fancy, and have supposed that Lydia, the seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord opened that day when Paul had none but women to speak to by the banks of the river at Philippi, had borne to her native city the tidings she had learnt to value. It is certainly against this that it should be recorded in the Acts, that she had a home and a household in Philippi—

that she was permanently resident there. There were a thousand other channels by which the gospel might reach Thyatira. She might commend to the prayers of Paul her former and native place—might even pray him to see to it that some one did preach the gospel there; and as her power of persuasion, and her active, purpose-like character are distinctly brought out in her short intercourse with the apostle, it may have been *indirectly* through her that this church, which still exists, was founded. Its fortunes were none of the best. Not guided in the truth by wise and able rulers as Ephesus had been, not sifted by trial like Smyrna, she soon outran Pergamos in error, and the heathen themselves in corruptness of life. Corruption was here not only allowed, but represented and ruling in the church. To an observer who regarded merely the outside, things might seem most prosperous. Influential the church certainly was, and no doubt numerous. Probably there were very few professedly heathen in the city, or at least they were a powerless minority. To one who judged by what lay a little deeper, heathenism would appear almost respectable beside this church, or rather beside one part of it. For let us bear in mind that here there

were two parties in the church: those who held the truth, but were too weak to exercise the required discipline; and those who maintained error, that they might win the world. The rulers of this church most run after were men of the world. They found they could be more men of the world by being churchmen; had more wealth, more importance, more applause, more power; every way could move and use the world more effectually by belonging to the church. They may, some of them, have been of very little note or consequence until they identified themselves with the church and became authoritative only by using its authority.

And as our Lord so distinctly separates these two parties, and as, probably, they would be distinctly known by party names to one another, let us view them separately as here presented,—not omitting to notice how forcibly the tenderness as well as the omniscience of Christ is here declared. Those who could receive His commendation were very probably fewer in number than the rest, and not all uncontaminated by so near contact with the impure; yet *they* are His church, and of this He will remind them. It is not to the most popular teachers He addresses Himself, but to those

who, neglected by Christ's professing people, might be ready to believe they were neglected by Himself. They had nothing to shew such as the other party had,—no show of miracles and gifts of tongues; no eloquence nor striking demonstrations, nor any crowd of half-made converts; and there might be some shame beginning to possess them, some temptation to believe that the others must be right; and that, after all, they must throw in their lot with them—adopt all those ceremonies that were hateful and cumbrous to their simple faith, connive at those pious frauds whereby the heathen were astonished into acquiescence, and sit silent while iniquities were practised in the name of Christ. To men thus tempted, how appropriate is this full and hearty commendation! Did their false brethren make the least of all they had done? Christ would make the most of it; and therefore we have here the fullest and richest commendation that we find in any of these epistles. His searching eye is not detained by the outward appearance; does not only examine the outside, and *calculate* what is within; does not, from long observation of the deeds, *conclude* what the motive is; but passes inwards, and sees, in one view, the

whole history of each action and each word,—sees, along with each expression in the life, the particular intention and the state of the heart from which it springs. Looking at the fruit, He sees not the fruit only, but each deepest fibre of the root, and the inmost sap of each furthest fibre. All fruit that is merely hung on,—diligently fixed up to make a show and semblance of fruitfulness, but has no vital connection, does not naturally *grow out* of the living tree,—He leaves there to wither. But in the case of the faithful in Thyatira, there was more than outside: it is not a mere crust, behind which is only hollowness; a sepulchre well whited, but within full of corruption and death. ‘I know thy works,’ He says, ‘and *charity*, and service, and faith, and thy patience; and thy last works to be more than the first.’

See here, then, what your Lord commends, and inquire, if you need to inquire, whether it be such a record He makes in passing through you. Has He to stop at the very first? Are there not even works of the right kind, or are these works only performed unwillingly by you, that you may less painfully see your own defect of all that is true and right-hearted and enduring in character? Do you find it far easier to do

the law, hard as that is, than to have that love which is the fulfilling of the law? Do you say, 'Any grace but this of love,—this levelling, equalising grace, that brings me really to consider all men as much as myself,—this is too humbling. I will, as I can, give alms to them that need, service to those that acknowledge it; I will fulfil all that I am engaged to any one to perform, and my respect shall not be lacking to those who are above me; but love—no, unless there be any profit in deceiving myself, I need not say I *love* all or many?' And yet, all that is accepted of Christ must bear love's mark upon it. Without this it is nothing towards the fulfilment of His law, whatever else it may do or advance. And do not say there is no room for love in your employments; you might just as well say there was no time for you to think or breathe. Nothing is the worse done for being done in this spirit, and nothing is less effectively done because it springs from this source; nay, there is nothing so important that love will not increase the value of, and nothing so small that love will not enhance and give an eternal value to. You believe that, for some situations or occupations in life, love is needed: for watching the sick; for abandoning all prospect of ad-

vancement, and carrying the tidings of salvation to the savage and heathen; for entering and residing in an hospital of lepers, to give aid to the helpless and abandoned; or for any of those less important occupations, which do not, however, the less distinctly shew that the person has very little thought of self, and a great deal of consideration for others. Now, it is quite true that there is such a distinction, and that in sacred Scripture these works of self-denying love are distinguished from other good works, and are called 'ministry,' or, as here, 'service.' But in no part of sacred Scripture is there ground given you to suppose that these offices of charity should be left to certain persons, much of whose life is spent in them; and that while they continue to perform this service, there is no call for yours. On the contrary, as Christ came to minister to you, so He expects that you will minister to Him; and though now you cannot, like these women of old, minister to the wants of His person with your substance, He tells you that the poor are always with you, though He is removed, and that whoso gives a cup of cold water in His name, gives it to Himself. Suppose that you knew He Himself were on earth, and were

sick or weary or athirst, would you be in doubt whether or not it was your place to relieve Him? would you not feel some grief if another got before you and ministered to His wants? He tells you that *you* may now, living where you are, render Him similar service. You please Him as much by relieving any that need relief, as you would by relieving Himself. You serve Him as well. And whoso thinks his love finds sufficient expression in his ordinary business, and will not put forth his hand to any works of charity that somewhat test his love,—to any service which he could not do, had he not true love to Christ,—that man may fear lest his religion be, or be becoming vain. No doubt love must be the root of *all* you do; but unless you be doing something you could not do except in the strength of love, then it may not certainly follow, but it very probably will, that your love will die. And why? Because the truth is, we do need to be driven to Christ; practically we do. We need to learn that we cannot get on without Him; need to have duties meeting us which cannot be performed unless our hearts be right with Christ, and which will send us back to Him for strength,—will drive us to renew our faith on

Him. For, of course, as the words before us further shew, it is faith that is the root of love. You cannot make yourself love whom you will, or because it is right; you may complain for ever of the hardness of your heart, and it will become no more tender. What you are to do is to learn of Christ, the meek and lowly; to wait on Him for the renewal of your heart; and if it do not follow in your case that faith worketh by love, then one sinner will at last have been found whom Christ is unable or unwilling to help.

The patience here commended is not endurance of actual suffering, but that patient continuance in well-doing, which, without seeing any great results, yet feels equally bound, at every moment of its course, to serve the Lord Christ. This patience will, in the long run, shew where our works are coming from,—whether they are done to keep the person of Christ and His claims distant from us,—to grant Him so much, that He may not further interfere,—or whether they be flowing from His person through us, who are keeping within reach of His influence, and living thus or thus because He would have us to do so, and enables us to do so. And so will your last works necessarily be more than your first. Were it a

monstrous thing that a child should be born, but never grow? And is it a thing to be expected as natural and seemly, that, once you are born of the Spirit, you should remain the same? Are you proud of advance in everything else, but ashamed to be recognised as leading a holier life than once you did; ashamed of being more led by the influence of Christ than once you were; more afraid of soiling your conscience and neglecting means of grace? It is a bad case with you if you have to go back upon your own experience. The good works you then did should have opened up a way to better, and fitted you for better. Why is it that old age is garrulous of the achievements of its youth? Because it has no present that it sees to be worth living in. Did it recognise and perform the duty of the present, it would not be forced back to the past. What Christ commends is, that you be from day to day surpassing yourselves: *He* will take care of your past; and you may be very sure that anything you may have done worth publishing is remembered by Him. It is not what you *were*, but what you *are*, that most concerns you to inquire; not what you have done, but what you *are* doing. Things that once called

forth your whole strength, should now be easy ; acts that were once only occasional and done with effort, should now be habitual ; duties you could once scarcely bring your mind to, you should now do cheerfully. And if it be so with you,—if it be so that you would rather be judged by the things freshest in your memory, than by any selection you could make from your lives,—if to-day or yesterday is your best day, then aim higher still. With no disparagement of what you are, it may be said to you, ‘Be more.’ If you are not prepared to add anything to your efforts,—if you do not see why you should thus put yourself about to surpass yourself,—do you value Christ’s commendation ? Something must be wrong if you would do no more for Christ known twenty years, than for Christ known ten. Were the reasons then to serve him many ? and are they not multiplied now ?

The other party in the church is described in language drawn from the Old Testament history ; not now, as in Pergamos, from the wilderness condition of the Israelites, but from the kingdom. The condition of the church in Thyatira was the New Testament likeness of the Old Testament kingdom, but not, alas ! in

the best state of the kingdom,—not in the David and Solomon days, which typified all that was good in the kingdom of Christ, and taught men all the glory and benefit of the kingdom state, and inspired them with strong desire to see all this carried to its ideal in Christ; but the imagery which can alone be used of Thyatira is drawn from the days of darkest declension—from the days of Ahab the king, of whom it is written that ‘above all that were before him he did evil in the sight of the Lord.’ Of Ahab it is written: ‘It came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, ~~the~~ daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians (a people abominable in their idolatry beyond all others, and beyond all we can realise), and went and served Baal and worshipped him. And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.’ And again it is written: ‘There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, *whom Jezebel* his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols.’ What this wickedest of women dealt in as her

chief wickednesses may be gathered from Jehu's answer to Joram when he came out to meet him, and said, 'Is it peace, Jehu?' and Jehu answered, 'What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel *and her witchcrafts* are so many?'

To this woman the wickedness of the false teachers had linked the church of Thyatira. This is the person they are most like, and this the period of the kingdom of Israel that most fitly depicts their fallen condition. Far be it from them to have set up so execrable a model, yet this is what they have come to. And as every form of wickedness seems to have at least once in the history of the world found a man to practise and carry it to its full horror, so that *now*, when any extraordinary criminality presents itself, instead of describing in detail its perpetrator, we say shortly, 'He is another Nero,' 'a second Dominic: '* here our Lord, instead of at length laying to the charge of these teachers all their abominations, far more effectively shews them their frightful corruption, by setting before them one whom they already hated, and in whom they yet saw as in a

* Trench *in loc.*

mirror their own very image. Jezebel, He says, is risen from the dead, and with increased subtlety and power lives and rules among you. They lived as the worst of pagans in God's kingdom, and seduced God's subjects to their abominations. They had gained authority in the church, and used this authority for no godly end; but by lying wonders and the terror of their name, as prophets and anointed of God, blinded the servants of Christ and drove them to all iniquity. Jezebel did not refuse the power she held through Ahab, the anointed king of Israel, but never had she a thought of using this power for the good of her subjects,—of any one but herself,—and least of all for God. She was glad of it, because thereby she could do her pleasure; she exercised a power among God's people against God's will, and maintained it by terror and sorceries. And in the church of Thyatira all this was reproduced: they called themselves prophets (ver. 20), and spoke of knowing the depths (ver. 24); they had left Pergamos far behind; they would use no arguments with their people, but if questioned on any point of the doctrine which they authoritatively laid down they used to say, 'It is a depth'—it is not for

you to know, you must receive our teaching and do our bidding. Yes, our Lord says, they *are* depths in very truth, '*as they speak*;' but they are depths of Satan. They veil with these mysteries of theirs a very hell; they are initiated, they are profound; but it is because already on earth they have found all the craft, callousness, and corruption of hell, and are plunged in the depths of it.

And it were mere affectation to pass this description without saying that we see very well its living counterpart. We cannot deny that in *some* of its parts we may be warned against *tendencies* perceived in ourselves; but neither can we shut our eyes to the fact that every feature of this description occurs in the Church of Rome. There is no room here to draw a detailed parallel between the two, and there is very little need to do so. Like Thyatira, the Church of Rome is set in the midst of the churches, so that all the churches know her; and you have only to examine her, as here invited by Christ, to see that while much of the commendation may belong to her as well as to the original Thyatira, the rebuke also is strikingly merited by that powerful, deceiving, and corrupt church.

And who is the strong Jehu, furiously driving, yet steady and self-restrained, able to draw from his tossing chariot of war an unerring arrow at the joints of the harness, who shall remorselessly, because righteously and justly, cast down this Jezebel, and tread her under foot, and kill her children with death? ‘The Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.’ There was no fear in Jehu’s heart, for God sent him; and shall not the Anointed, to whom God hath said, ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee’—shall not He, who has received power over the nations from His Father, accomplish His pleasure among them? When asked to go out and face Jehu, and fight for their father’s house and throne, the sons of Ahab ‘were exceedingly afraid, and said, Behold two kings stood not before him; how then shall we stand?’ And who shall stand before Him who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire? Though Jezebel were a king’s daughter, yet did the conquering Jehu tread her under foot, and the dogs coming after him left nothing that could be gathered up and buried; what then shall be the destruction when He comes whose feet are like fine brass, and the trampling of

whose judgment shall break the nations to shivers? In that terrible, swift, unswerving, and irresistible advance of Jehu, messenger after messenger was sent out in alarm to meet him, saying, 'Is it peace?' and to each his answer was still the same, 'What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.' And so at the coming of the Lord it is too late to be sending forth messengers of peace; the time for that is for ever by. 'I *gave* her space to repent,' says our Lord, 'and she repented not.' And now she will receive according to her works.

What would be the effect of this epistle read before the congregation? Do you think that men would then need to say, 'Lord, is it I?' or would not the conscience of each accuse or excuse according as the works of each had been? And though there are men in our own day, as in others, whose prominence in wickedness teaches, and whose terrible fate writes again for the reading of all who have eyes to see, this principle, 'Every man according to his works,' let us not forget that the principle applies equally to all, and that those whom men could not rank on one side or other are open to Christ, and ought to be known also to

themselves. What life are you building up? Is it such as you can present before God, and say, 'According to *this*, Lord, let it be unto me'? Remember you *are* making your own future: while you are so lightly passing time day by day into oblivion, your eternity is shaping. This principle of which you are so constantly reminded in God's word, and which He keeps ever before you in providence, is at work now, and at work in the case of every one of you; no life can escape it, and every eternity will reveal it. Hell, you say, is for great sinners, for men very different from you; but God does not judge in the mass; 'though there were only one man worthy of hell, hell would be prepared for that man.' It is 'every man' according to his own works. You may be very unlike many with whom you will spend eternity, and what you have to do is not to be sufficiently like others whom you may judge to be safe enough; it is to do such works as you know God approves, and as you are prepared to reap the fruits of. Do not then deceive yourself by thinking that as there are but two parties, and as you are liker the one than the other, therefore you are safe, and the Judge may come to-day so far as you are concerned. It is very

true there are but two parties; but you will be judged as if there were none but yourself in the world, and to you will be rendered, not according to the general merit of the church, or the character of those you spend your life with, but solely according to the works you have done. And if you speak of a connection with Christ, then remember that God admits no connection which is not vital and productive, real and not fanciful.

You have seen how richly He commends, how long He forbears, how swiftly and terribly Christ comes to judgment. Now, see how liberally He promises. He has Himself earned all the glory and the power; but not to Himself does He keep it. As He has received of the Father, so He offers to you. What God has judged worthy to give to the one He most honours in the universe,—what Christ, who values everything at the truth, has deemed worthy to receive,—is offered to you. Would that every man would only believe the liberality of God's love, and be content to wait for a while for these gifts of His, instead of spending his strength for nought and in vain,—seeking to earn what the grasp crushes when found! To understand the significance of the promises

here delivered, you must remember the state of the first recipients: tempted to assume authority; to serve themselves of God's people, or of those whom they could awe by their deceits. To these Christ says, 'You *shall* rule the nations, but not *thus*; you must follow my path to my kingdom. Keep my works, who proclaimed myself not a king of this world, but not the less a king. There is a right side to your error; all things *are* yours, because you are mine. I have authority over all men in all their concerns: the world is mine, and the fulness thereof; nevertheless, you are not to assert this authority now; you are not proudly to claim all as your right because you are Christians. It is "the meek" who shall inherit the earth;—those of you who faithfully hold fast that which you have, and are satisfied, through trial, through scorning and poverty, through weakness and loss in this world, still to keep *my* works, and, following my footsteps, to inherit my power. Learn to rule by obeying. Self-restraint is the only school for the king. In the end this will find its reward. In the end all things shall be shewn subject to me: those who are nearest to me shall be really in all things highest; those who are opposed

to me shall be destroyed. But the time is not yet. You need yet a training for the rule you are to exercise; it is too great to be committed to men untried. Wait for the honour I shall give, and the power, the advantages, and the employments, and you *will* find that, just in proportion to your faithfulness to me, will you be served of all things. You will know that all things are mine; that all God has made,—all He has, by His infinite wisdom, contrived to bless and to enrich—all that actually exists anywhere, and all that His infinite resources can call into being,—are mine; you will know this by the manifoldness, the wealth, and the suitableness of your own possessions and power. You know not how you limit my promise when you envy earthly rulers, and would serve yourselves of this world. The “morning star” shall be yours,—that star which, when the darkness of this world is past, and when all the other stars of this world pale and flee away before the coming day, still shines. Yours shall be that glory which hangs about the morning of the everlasting day, and which is seen brightest when the darkness is streaked with the signs of sunrise. Your glory and brightness shall be more glorious and bright

when the signs of my coming are certain.' If there be any who fear that, in the coming of the Son of God, their hope, their glory, their possession, their all, may be precarious; if there be any who have been or are in darkness, and who weary and moan as they that watch for the morning; then why is it so, when these promises are proclaimed and laid open freely to 'every man that hath an ear to hear'?



V.

Sardis.

REV. III. 1-6.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write ; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars ; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die : for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white : for they are worthy.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

THE first thing which strikes a reader of this fifth epistle is, that it represents a circumstantially different church-condition from any of the former. Here is no mention of heresy, of false prophecy, of idol worship, or of persecution. In looking forward to the sixth and seventh epistles, we find that a similar distinction is observable in them. There are no longer outward enemies nor heretics to contend with; but there is an equally dangerous internal weakness. We are not told of anything peculiarly trying in the church of Sardis (unless it were the absence of everything peculiarly trying);* and, in the case of Laodicea, we find that it was the very exuberance of advantages that brought upon her such poverty. We are to see then, in these remaining epistles, how the church will succeed in favourable

* See Stier *in loc.*

circumstances; to see whether she will be altogether a different and better church when her position is recognised, when her teachers are orthodox, and when her reputation is unblemished. How will she walk when she is set in the right way, and left undisturbed? And so there is a kind of interruption here in the series. In the title our Lord here assumes, He reminds us of that under which He addressed the church in Ephesus. He makes a second beginning,—shewing Himself once more as the Head of the churches, who has the seven stars. Again, the separation of this second part of the series from the first is shewn by the form of the promises, which are no longer delivered under symbols of the Old Testament history, but of the New Testament church. Further, the three remaining epistles have this in common, as distinguishing them from the former, that in each of them our attention is directed more forcibly forwards to the coming of the Lord.

If you ask how this church was formed, or how it acquired its name for life, no answer can be given beyond what you may suppose from its position. It is not so very difficult a matter to get a name for anything. The difficulty is to attain to the reality which the highest

names signify. Without even any will of our own,—before we are conscious of our own identity,—we receive the highest of names, being called Christians; but if you have at all possessed yourself of the wealth which that name bears, it has not been without strong efforts of will,—resolutions that are connected with a change in the springs of your life and conduct. Now, this is just the key-note of this epistle; the difference between name and reality; or rather, the difference between the name that has no reality underlying it, and the name which expresses the real condition. Christ tells us here that we may have a name which may be only deceiving us,—which is nothing but a name; and we may have a name written in the book of life, and whereby we shall be known to God and angels,—a name wrought out by us in this life, and to be deeper stamped upon us as our eternity exercises, develops, and confirms the graces given us. ‘There are names,’ says our Lord, ‘among you; worthy names, names of life: some of you are strangely satisfied with the mere name, which is nothing; possess yourselves of the reality which your name signifies, and you will be possessed of a prize which you will deem worthy

of my gift, and of your reception.' This is briefly what our Lord says through Sardis.

To Sardis Christ reveals her own condition in these words: 'Thou hast a name to live, and art dead; I have not found thy works perfect before God; yet thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.' The name was a great name—a name to live; the corresponding reality was to fulfil the works appointed, and to keep unspotted from the world. Not having this reality, the *name* of life was all that overlaid and kept out of sight the unseemly reality of death. There was no church that had such a reputation as this; she was the praise of all of whom she was not the envy. She, if any, would have been excused had she surveyed the progress of the Head of the church, and congratulated herself on what He would find in her. He has been grieved in Ephesus, grieved in Pergamos, grieved in Thyatira; but among us are no Balaamites, nor Nicolaitanes, nor lying prophetess. Of all the cities of Asia, this was the one a cautious parent would have chosen for the residence of his son. No fear there of heretics, of idol worship, or of the world's seduction. *There* are no strange opinions

started; no, for all opinions are alike dead. There is no contention; no, the quiet and peace of the grave are there. There is no doubting, no questioning whether Scripture be indeed the word of God, because Scripture is received as a mere foundation for a creed, a storehouse of arguments for doctrine, and not as the very voice of God, which must be all or nothing. All goes on comfortably and complacently. A sweet smile is on the face of Sardis, and quiet calm over all her members; for deep slumber is upon her. There is none of the tumult and danger of life, neither is there any of its earnestness and its labour and its progress; there are no strange growths nor wild offshoots, neither is there any good fruit; the tree is dead. There is none of the danger of the tempestuous sea, but there is the more terrible danger of the smooth and oily circles of the whirlpool; the noiseless and rapid rush of the river towards its fall,—every wave and breaker, every hindrance and bar sucked in and swept down together in the one fatal direction. And at Sardis were no such gross sins commonly and openly committed as had stained the other churches. The members were decent, well-conducted, industrious, moral people, else they could

never have acquired the reputation for life they enjoyed. Their garments, it is true, were defiled, but not by rolling and wallowing in the filth in which some at Thyatira had sunk, but rather by an occasional stain, contracted by brushing too close to what should have been distantly avoided, or splashed on them while crossing the world's path. These spots were noticed only by Christ, whose blood had washed what was thus again defiled. It is not before men there was any imperfection, but before God. Their part was well played, so far as men could see ; but the part God had assigned them they did not perform. Their works were not perfect. To all there is in the sight of God a definite task appointed ; as if God were saying at the beginning, This man can accomplish so much ; and so much is expected of him in the end. And their measure the church of Sardis had not filled up : they had not completed their service ; had not rightly filled their place ; had not used the opportunities of it, nor generously and industriously discharged its severer duties. And therefore they are condemned. In this orthodox and unimpeachable, this man-applauded church, where every ordinance was rightly administered, a crowded and

frequent worship maintained, a membership regularly and satisfactorily increasing,—in this church, which was an example and ornament to the Christian world of Asia, Christ saw what provoked His quicker condemnation than anything his eye penetrated to in Thyatira.

Amidst all the corruption of Thyatira, all that called forth the emphatic and righteous condemnation of the other churches, there was an activity and love, a faith and patience, which proved that the church still lived. But here, when the church gathered to hear her expected commendation, striving to make a show of humility, but very visibly anticipating that the applause of men will be sealed by the applause of their Lord, these are the words that break upon their scarcely-crediting ear: ‘Thou art dead,’—dead too, and not decently hidden, but garnished and tricked out with all the shows of life,—a great deception. It is bad enough to be suddenly introduced to the darkened chamber, and dimly make out the rigid form of the dead wrapt in the unmoved and uncoloured shroud; but it is ghastly and frightful to see the pinched and livid features and the stiffened limbs clothed in the garments, and decked in the ornaments of the living. It

is the existence of the two things together that creates the loathing and horror; the reality of death with the appearance of life. Better far to make no show, no profession, than to have that only. Each article that suggests life in the presence of death, makes death more unbearable; and so every word or act of mere profession condemns, as nothing else can condemn, the lack of the reality. You come regularly to the house of God. So important a matter do you count His worship to be, that there is *nothing* you more habitually, more regularly, perform. Then, how does this condemn you, if, having come to His house, there is no true worship in your soul! You come to the table of the Lord, and would judge that man to be in a really hopeless case who refused thus to come; then what if, with this distinct profession of the need of communion, you have no real communion with your Redeemer? By every act of mere profession, you pass a distinct condemnation upon yourself—*more* distinct than if you said, ‘This I ought to do, but this I do not: so urgent is this, that I would not for much *seem* not to do it, or be convinced that I am not doing it; and yet I do it not.’ *So needful* do you perceive the ordinances and

work, the graces and realities of religion to be, that you will rather maintain a constant self-deception, than once for all be persuaded that you are destitute of all that Christ gives. Like the mother that clasps her dead child to her bosom, and strives in her despair to pour her own life into it, and will not believe that it is gone, and cannot put from her as dead clay that which has been her joy and her life, so it is no wonder that scarcely can one persuade you that in those names and forms, which to some are all alive and instinct with bliss, there is only death, and the corruption of death, to you.

But if the condition of any among you be so suspicious, and if it would be such an utter revolution and razing of years of comfortable profession and reputation were you to come to the knowledge of your condition, say how much more appalling do you make your condition by refusing to face its truth! Is this not why Christ denounces hypocrites and formalists with such woe as his lips pronounce on none besides, because by their hypocrisy they at once proclaim their need of Him, and refuse to receive Him? Why *pretend* to have what you may have in reality at any moment? Why de-

ceive yourselves? why put yourselves off with a form? why perish with the name, when the reality of what you so acknowledge the value of is before you, and made over to you by the gift of God? The mother may be excused while she deludes herself that that is not dead for which there is no present resurrection; but for all these forms of Christian life there is an immediate resurrection, if you will only believe. To the most glorious and promising name you bear, there is an answering reality for you as well as for another. Are you dead? does something now and then whisper, before you can stifle it, After all, this is but a name; I, my inmost person and my life, are not Christian?—then, whatever Christ has said He is, He is for you; *He* is not a dead name, but in Him remains life.

Let, then, this remain with us as a conviction—that it is not always the best sign of a church or an individual that things are going on reputably and smoothly. Men are not machines, and living men cannot be handled as the dead. The very peculiarity of the state here brought before us is—the thinking that all is well. There may be no intentional deceit,—no desire to have a character for what

you are not,—it may surprise you much to learn the difference (or that there is any difference) between what you seem and what you are. You cannot, therefore, know that this is not *your* condition, without serious, earnest, and patient examination. Habitual suspicion of your state may produce many evil results; but occasional suspicion is nothing more than the word of God enjoins, and the deceitfulness of the heart requires. It is wrong, and is often the sign of a secret love of sin, and shrinking from the more arduous duties, or of very unenlightened or meagre faith, to be always doubting of one's own condition; but those who never doubt (if there be any such, who yet really live) must be of a quite singular experience. Would Christ, then, were He writing to us, have to alter this epistle, and say: 'Thou hast a name to live, and thou livest; thou art called a member of my body, and art filled with my Spirit, and actuated by my will; you have received the symbols of my body and blood, and you humbly and penitently feel that out of me you are nothing,—lifeless, hopeless, and lost; you are frequent in acts of devotion, and every act is but the expression of your kindling and eager spirit. I cannot bear any but living members;

but in you I find pleasure, for of a truth there is life in you'? Some of you, as in Sardis, Christ would doubtless affectionately separate from the general condemnation; would feel himself accused in your accusation; and would just as soon omit to present his own obedience before the Father, as forget to present yours offered through Him. The anxiety with which you watch for the success of a friend whom you have advised and aided; the fondness with which a parent waits to hear of a son's advancement; the exultation with which a commander hails the victory of his troops,—are poor similitudes for that tender and intense watchfulness with which your Redeemer bends to accept your services, to which His blood has redeemed you, His love constrained and provoked you, and which His discrimination alone could detect, and His grace alone receive.

To enter a little more into the definite idea of this epistle, you will observe that the name and garment are linked together throughout, and suggest to us that rite of baptism in which these two were also of old linked together. This church, trusting too much to all outward things, ordinances, and rites, and names, trusted especially to baptism. They were all named

Christians, and had been baptised: was not that enough? It is in the rite of baptism that profession of becoming a member of Christ's body is first made; in other words, it is in baptism that the name which includes all other names, the name of Christian, is received. And in order to see the force of this epistle, you must bear in mind, that in these early times of Christianity, baptism necessarily appeared in a somewhat different aspect from that in which we commonly view it. They were not all *infants* who were then received into the church. The church had to be formed of men grown up in heathenism. These men, when the gospel had been preached to them, and when they were convinced that they needed a Saviour, and that Christ was willing and able to save all who attached themselves to Him, were invited to this ordinance of baptism, wherein they professed themselves believers, adherents, or disciples of Christ. In this ordinance the initial transaction of a man with Christ was (I would not say represented, but) formally enacted. On Christ's side there is the acceptance of the man; on the man's side, the acceptance of Christ. On Christ's side there is the pledge of purifying and strengthening, *i. e.* of saving in-

fluence; on the man's, the pledge of complete surrender to and trust in Christ. Observe, then, that baptism was to these men the most solemn ordinance, the time of baptism the most solemn time of their lives: it was then that the faith begotten within their hearts was confessed with the mouth, and that by a deliberate act they acknowledged their need of Christ, and their belief that He, and He alone, could save from sin; it was, in fact, their entrance to the new life. It was then they acknowledged the power of that new name in the world. It was in this ordinance they definitely came out of heathenism, and became Christians. And then they were clothed in white, to denote the purity in the sight of God of those who are joined with Christ: to denote that they were *invested*, as we say, with a new and pure character, which they would do their utmost to maintain. And often, if not always, the converts at baptism changed their own name, that they might yet more distinctly shew the change that had now passed on them; as Christ changed the name of Peter when he became a disciple. Now, in singular correspondence with this practice, there is mention made here of a book of life, in which the names of the baptised are written.

So that these three things, the receiving the name of Christ, the washing with water and clothing in white, and the entering of the Christian's own name in the book of life, were the outside symbols of the great realities of baptism.

There were the same realities underlying our baptism, and conveyed to us in it. If you say your baptism was nothing, if you have made no use of it, then why is it so? Is Christ a mere name? Consider how He reveals Himself to those of this church that had gone through merely the form of baptism. He reminds them that He hath the seven Spirits and the seven stars. He has the seven stars, *i. e.*, as we have found, the ministers of the church universal; so that whatever they do as His ministers, they do for Him in His stead; whatever they do, He does; what they do in symbol, He does in reality. And He hath the seven Spirits, *i. e.*, He has the fulness of the Spirit to bestow, in all needed operation, on all His people. If, then, your baptism has been nothing to you, it is because you have been wanting, not because He has failed; because you have been satisfied to cheat yourselves with names, while He presses upon you the

rich reality. If you find anything that He has appointed as a means of grace barren, whatsoever it be, then do meet Him as He here reveals Himself to you as the source of the life-giving, all-filling Spirit. If your name of Christian is nothing, if you might as well never have joined yourself to the church, for all the practical good it has done you, then you have not yet reached Christ as the holder of the seven Spirits. In baptism you received the name of Christian; Christ presented Himself as ready to bestow all that His name conveys, *i. e.* in a word, salvation. But it is the law by which God's giving in grace is regulated, that we receive by faith, that is, that we willingly accept what He gives. In other words, He does not *force* upon us salvation. And therefore you may have the name of Christian, and be lost; having a name that you are joined to Him in whom is all support and life, you may find death.

What, then, has Christ to say to those who are in this danger? 'Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.' Consider what was done in your baptism. You were made over to Christ: and He who hath the seven stars declared, by the act of His minister, His readiness to receive you.

He pledged Himself there to be your faithful and sufficient Saviour. And however you have denied His grace, He abideth faithful; He holds to the promise He there gave, and is as ready now as ever He was to make you the full possessor of all that union to Himself implies. And is it not worth your while to take His counsel, to go back upon that pledge of His; shaking yourselves from sleep, or at least awaking to a brighter consciousness of the nearness and personality of that transaction with Christ wherein He received you in His arms?—God forbid to be put from Him as a dead thing! He has not words in our human speech, nor figures, to depict the state and danger of the man who draws around himself this curtain and blind of a name, and will not arouse to the real blessedness behind the name. To those at Sardis, and through them to all thus dead asleep, He cries, ‘Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die;’ like those whom cold has subdued to slumber, and slumber is changing to death, and whose only chance is rough arousing and cherishing the parts still alive. The cry is sudden, as if a man slumbering were awakened, not gently by the voice of his child’s

laughter mingling with his dreams, and gradually leading forth his consciousness to a reality more pleasant than even the pictures of his fancy, but by a sudden cry to save himself from fire or sword. Not more startling was the shout of the shipmaster which broke through the deep slumber of Jonah as he lay dreaming of his sunny home in Palestine, his vine and his fig-tree, his wife and his children, and suddenly called him from the land of his dreams to the lash and roar of the tempest, the straining and plunging of the vessel, with all help past, and no hope between him and death, but to rise and call upon his God. Not more astounding to the dead Lazarus to wake and find himself alive, and yet buried; in the world, and yet entombed.

But who hath ears to hear this cry? For whom is this letter sent among us? yea, rather, for whom is it not? Who among us may safely pass it to his neighbour, saying, 'Not for me'? Can you not believe that there is any danger in your state?—no fear that to you, at least, the Lord may come as a thief in the night? Have you had so short a time to go back upon and secure that transaction with Christ? Has he far to come, that He should

not come soon? or do you disregard that wise proverb that was in the mouths even of the heathen at Sardis,* that justice dwells nigh to mortals, not seen but seeing; that her feet are shod with wool, but her hand cased and armed with iron? Do you think those threatenings that time after time, through the whole period of the existence of men upon earth, have been executed, will not be executed on you? Do you think you may safely disregard those warnings which the case of thousands before you has made necessary, and which thousands before you disregarding *have* perished? The words of Christ are not arrows shot at a venture. How the Christians of Sardis would have compassionated any one who told them that a future traveller in their city would seek in vain for a Christian! *They*, were not they the very centre of Christendom? had they not heard the apostles address them in their own tongue, and had they not among their own members men of almost apostolic gifts? were not they the very corner-stone of the church, which being taken away, all would fall? What need to them of watching, whose works were ready at any time for the examination of their Lord,

* Trench *in loc.*

who were not children of the night but of the day? But we read of no such Christian condition in all the word of God as can dispense with watchfulness. You say there is no sign of your Lord's coming. It is this very thing that our Lord emphatically and constantly repeats, and on this very fact that He grounds His warning to you to watch. Have everything ready, and hold fast. Take firm hold and keep firm hold of the blessings He offers you in His ordinances; make sure that you have not a mere fair outside before men, but the robe given by Christ, and well-pleasing to the eye of God; make sure that you have not only the name, appearance, and some of the privileges of the Christian, but that you are one. Do this, which you can do by meeting Him who hath the seven Spirits, Fountain of all life, and Restorer of all spiritual backsliding, Strengtheners of all that is weak, and Reviver of all that dies, and you will be ready.

The promise offered to those who thus approve themselves worthy, *i. e.*, those whose lives approve their profession, whose walk is such as becomes the gospel, who are uprightly and sincerely depending on and living by Christ,—to those the promise is that they shall be clothed

in white, and have their names confessed before the Father and His angels; that is, they will have all that the character and name of Christian here promises or implies. Seek for the reality that Christ's ordinances contain, and you will find and rejoice in it. The walking with Christ in white implies that your purity shall for His sake be approved in the sight of God, and that your personal character also shall be established in holiness. Is it very humiliating to have to come back, day by day, to the blood of Christ to be washed from sin? do you find it very hard, you are tempted to say impossible, to keep yourself from being defiled as soon as washed? Christ here says to you, Be not yet discouraged: the time comes when you shall have society that holds you from sin instead of tempting you to it, and when all your occupations and circumstances shall so conspire that your garments shall be kept spotless. Hold fast even to overcoming, and not only shall you be presented before the Father spotless, but you shall be enabled to company gladly, and though humbly, yet unashamed, with Jesus Christ. You shall walk with Him.

And when your name is found uncanceled

in the book of life, and is confessed before the Father and his angels, you will learn that the receiving your name was no such insignificant part of baptism as some would make you believe. It may not be *the* thing, but it is the necessary accompaniment of receiving the name of Christian. There were some pagans whom the Roman Catholic missionaries used to baptise in crowds, sprinkling them as they stood packed indiscriminately together. Here one most meaning part of baptism was forgotten, viz., that Christ receives his people one by one, knowing by name each one, knowing whom He is receiving, and for whom it is He undertakes. Besides, then, bearing the name of Christian, you bear a Christian name; besides belonging to the mass whom Christ saves, you have Him saving you by that special care and those special aids you need in distinction from others. And *He* deals with names very differently from the scriptural manner of dealing with them, who thinks it nothing that he got his name in connection with, and as a significant part of, a religious ordinance. You may have made that name the synonym for much looseness and carelessness of life; those who know you, when they name you, may have a very unchris-

tian character in their view; you may have draggled the name long ago received through long paths of deep defilement, or may have been proud it should be known as belonging to and marking out a scoffer, or at least a non-professor; but Christ remembers your name, and He calls you this day to say whether you will have it blotted out from His memory, or confessed by Him before the Father. Is there any among you who shrinks from coming out and joining Christ, and accepting all that blessedness which he knows Him to contain, on this ground, because he fears that he must, to do this, become so very different a person from what he now is? Do you fear that in Christ there will be little scope for the development of what is in you—that you can do more and be more in the world than in Christ? Then know, that in Christ alone is there full scope for you becoming all you are fitted to become. In Him alone is there room for all that makes up your personality to shew itself and live. Everything that is yours will not be kept, but all that is *you* will more abundantly live in Him. This He teaches you, by telling you that He alone can confess your name, reading it from the book of life. He alone can

introduce you as a named person, with your own distinct interests and character, into eternity; He alone can give you a suitable standing in the world to come. And this He teaches by the forms of this world. Omit from your life that religious event wherein you were formally made over to Him, and you are nameless in the world. It is in connection with Christ that you have received a personal name, and in Him you will receive all that can give you a separate standing before God, no longer lost in the lost mass of our race. God was not ashamed to be named after men, and to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let us, then, so live that Christ may not be ashamed to confess our names, and acknowledge Himself as our sanctifying Saviour before the Father, but may present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

VI.

Philadelphia.

REV. III. 7-13.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write ; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth ; and shutteth, and no man openeth ;

I know thy works : behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it : for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie ; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly : hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out : and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God ; and I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

TWO only of the seven churches received from our Lord epistles containing no word of rebuke: the suffering church of Smyrna, and the weak church of Philadelphia. Two only of the seven are still extant: four congregations now representing the martyrs of Smyrna, and 800 Christians now assembling for worship within the still flourishing town of Philadelphia. And that these two churches do yet exist and flourish, can be referred to nothing else than simply the fulfilment of the good-will of Christ, promised to them so long ago. There are not many churches that have so long a history as these two, nor many that could tell of such revolutions and emergencies safely ridden through. Everything else in these cities has felt the brunt of time. Conquering armies have swept the country again and again, leaving behind them little trace of the

old, and bringing in new governments, new manners, and new inhabitants; the bond between the ancient past and the present has been burst and burst again; but still the church of Philadelphia can trace an uninterrupted pedigree to this commended society.

Yet there is no one of these churches we may set on an *altogether* higher level than the rest, as there is none we may set on an altogether lower level. The ideal of a church yet remains unrealised. And thus we are warned that our hope must depend on some more sure foundation than on that of belonging to this church or the other. It is Christ that gives the promises, not the church; and except we possess what we could live on, were we alone in the midst of heathen, we have not what we can live on in the midst of Christians. If we are standing merely by the crowding support of those around us; if we are upright as others merely because we cannot fall; if we are leaning on something that may be taken away, then the church may not be more to us than it ought to be, but Christ is less to us than He ought to be. What if you see it to be your duty to separate yourself from the church, and go where there is not one to join with you in worship of Christ, or

living to Him ; what if it be your lot to spend many years confined to a generally solitary sickroom ; what, when you come to be severed, by the strange experiences of dissolution, from all the appearances and forms which Christianity takes in this world, and when you find that, do what others can for you, it is only you yourself that has to grapple for yourself with death ? The church has done her all for you, and must now bid you farewell. Your dearest friend cannot go further with you ; his hand may clasp yours, but he cannot retain its warmth, as your life gathers itself inwards, and retires ; his voice may speak words of strength, but the intelligence dies from beneath the ear ; his eye strives to meet your soul, but between you and him intervenes a dead sense ; between you and all that is outward there are new and separating experiences. When this comes, what is it that your soul can still keep, and round which it can rally, and by which it can confidently follow the path through the valley of death ? what is it you would then rather have than anything else ? what is it that you then can alone have, but just the word of Christ ?

It is this which the church of Philadelphia

illustrates,—the value of the word of Christ. In the epistle to Sardis, we were taught the folly, danger, and blasphemy of resting in names, and the wealth and glory which the names which Christ has brought into this world do cover and set forth. In this epistle we are taught that the security for all that these names signify being realised, is the word of Christ. This church of Philadelphia, which passes without reproach, is described as having kept Christ's word, and, again, as having kept 'the word of his patience.' The spiritual characteristic of it was a simple, and therefore humble faith. She had little strength; in numbers few; in worldly repute small; in influence, whether through talent or wealth, feeble. She knew this, and cast herself solely on the word of her Lord. When other churches made great display of what they had effected, and shewed before her (or even *at* her) tokens of the life that was in them, she was able through her humility, not through sloth or indifference to the cause of Christ, to be content that the weak as well as the strong have the promise of Christ. When Jews, who were no Jews, came to them and said, 'Ye are not of the separate people; ye go not up to meet

God at his one appointed meeting-place; ye have no glorious ceremonial handed down from generation to generation; ye are of the Gentiles, the uncircumcised, with whom God has made no covenant, but who have ever been aliens; the stream of God's purpose and favour has flowed past you, and you are left;—the Christians of Philadelphia still gathered to their heart the word they had heard and believed. They could not explain that mystery which had been hid from the ages of this world; they did not pretend to account for the fact that God had only within a few years first called the Gentiles; they could not tell why it was that the God of the whole earth should have so confined Himself, and as if limited His presence to one little spot; they *believed* that now it was otherwise. They had been told by men, who, they were sure, were no impostors, that God had been manifest in the flesh, and called all to repent and believe; and by that word of the Lord they clung. And when Gentiles spoke to them of persecution,—when the clouds were gathering thick, and rising from the horizon heavy, massed, and dark, portending a sweeping and desolating storm, such as might fitly foreshadow the great day of the

Lord,—when they were carried forward to that hour of temptation that was to come on all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth,—when they felt that it was now to be every man for himself, when mother could not help child, and son could not help parent,—still they kept the word of Christ, and denied not His name. Very significantly, therefore, is the word spoken of here as the ‘word of my patience;’ for the word of Christ, as the Philadelphians knew it, was not a word calling them to easy, and luxurious, and applauded entrance into the kingdom; but to much tribulation first, and the kingdom, with the glory of it, afterwards.

And if the example of weak and tried men, conquering through the power of the word, is not for all of us, certainly it is for a very great many. Interpret the words as we will, it is still through poverty of spirit the kingdom is inherited; still through much tribulation, inward or outward, the kingdom is to be entered; still the word of Christ is, to all who receive it, ‘the word of his patience.’ Take what joy we will in this life, and receive to the full the joys of a present salvation, still does that constant testimony of the Bible to the bleakness and misery of this life remain true. For affliction

we are taught to look ; and provision for affliction is made ready for us. Sore trial, when we are called on to do the thing we would not, and to cast behind us cherished desires, and sacrifice our heart's hopes ; long-continued difficulty, and waiting for relief, when we may not even take the comfort of murmuring, or of communicating our grievance or our sorrow ; deep dejection of spirit, and felt separation from the company of godly persons, by our own default or weakness or pride ; looking on the church and on the redeemed of Christ *as from without* (with the spirit of Gentiles)—as if their interests were not ours, and their hopes ours ; feeling that all things are tending forwards, accomplishing the pleasure of God, but ourselves left behind with no part nor lot in the matter ;—all this is in the way to the kingdom ; and through this the word of Christ, the invitation of God, can alone bring you. And there is that which all Christians have in common with the Philadelphians—the sense of their little strength ; the sense, indeed, of their utter impotence, of their total inability not only to save themselves from their sin, but to be of any use in carrying forward God's designs ; a sense of littleness and feebleness which causes them to

stand wondering if it can be that God calls them.

For this weakness is not a thing to be recognised only as proper for a sinner to acknowledge; it is that which makes itself felt. You do not merely *say* that sin has eaten out the strength of your life, and *pretend* dependence on another; but you come to a humbling, painful, distressing sense of your own weakness; you *are* humbled by your little strength. And this humiliation does not pass away as the morning cloud; through your whole career it will be your attendant experience. You are not made independent of Christ by once professing faith in Him; you remain just as weak in yourself, for saving purposes, after as before. The Christian grows strong not by once receiving the word, but by constantly receiving strength he is strong, and therefore often strongest when he feels weakest; often making most of Christ's word when he finds how truly it is called 'the word of his patience,'—the word that must be taken and kept hold of by the weak, humbled, patient, submissively waiting spirit. When a person receives the word, his standing in the sight of God *is* changed; he is no longer what he was;

but he is not, in the full and scriptural sense of the word, a saved person. Christ is now his, and therefore his salvation is sure, his Saviour being received; but his Saviour being received, or having received him, has still the work of salvation to perform in the believer's spirit and life. The Bible does not tell us, what would be so obviously contradicted by fact, that once a man accepts the word of the gospel, he is translated to a different world. He remains in the same world, but not of it; the word is now in the world along with him, and separating him from it, so that he knows that *it* is not that of which he is a part, and whose destiny shall be his. He is saved by hope, and the sole ground of his hope is the word. He feels all the uncertainty attaching to this world; but the word gives him a security for his future. He is often at a loss to see the mercy of God; but the word forbids despair. He is often overcome by temptation—sometimes even trodden under foot of his own corrupt heart; but the word remains the same, commanding him to rise. He sometimes, in the bitterness of his heart, even seeks to find in the word some justification of his enmity against God, some sentence that may commit him irretrievably to sin and rebellion;

but calmly, '*inexorably* merciful,' the word bids him live and love. All his evil is met by, and overcome by, its good. And believing this word, it purifies him; for it is the word of truth. It clears away from around him all that is false and deceitful, and settles him in the sure knowledge of what has been, is, and is to be in this world. It does not tell us that there has been no sin in the world, but that the Son of God has been in it. It does not tell us there is no misery in the world, nor even that it may be a very paradise to some; but it says there *is* a paradise, where you who are now in the world may hereafter be. It does not say, 'Whoever believes shall be at once delivered from all trouble and ill;' but it says the truth, that whoso believes shall have a *refuge* in every time of trouble, and shall be kept through all ill, and at length enter where there is no more curse.

To all, then, who are in this Philadelphian state,—all who are thinking that, for such as they are, purity, strength, peace can never be,—who feel weak and shut up, so that hourly they are tempted to let go the word,—Christ presents Himself as 'He that is holy, He that is true;' who, having the key, hath set open before you a door. Do you not seem to be

gaining forward? Do all those promises, from which you expected so much, seem locked treasures to you? Are you still outside, practically and really outside, however much security you may have of being sometime possessors of what is within? Are you driven back from the riches of Christ, as if they were not for this world at all, and as if you must just be satisfied to live by the motives, for the aims, on the principles of other men who make no profession? Are there those who hint to you that, in expecting *any* real help of a practical, appreciable kind in this life from Christ, you expect too much? When you have expected too easy and rapid a conquest of sin, too great liberty and strength in all duty, does some tempter whisper that you should not, in reason, expect any conquest of sin, nor any strength in duty; and are you sometimes fairly brought to a stand, like a man lost at night on a wild and trackless moor, who finds himself on the edge of an abyss, out of whose dark depths there roars a river he cannot see—who cannot go on, and has no strength or heart to go back? or, to adopt the powerful figure of this epistle, do you ever stand helpless and heartless before an impenetrable wall, that separates you from

all living? Are you miserable, and see nothing beyond and through your misery, and have no thought of any change of it, but just heartlessly go through your daily work for your daily bread, sighing coming before your meat,—sighing that you have to live, instead of thanksgiving that you do live?—then to you comes this same word of Christ: ‘I have set before you an open door.’ Possession to the full is not for this world; but as little is despair or heartless indifference for this world. Hope—sure, confident, and bright-eyed hope, is for this world,—a hope that will carry you forward through the open door set before you.

This door set open to us is a door of escape as well as of entrance. It is a door ‘before you,’ plain and manifest, so that, at whatever point of our course we feel that there is something to be escaped from, or something more to be entered on, the way is cleared for us. Here for the feeble is provision made for their safe and successful progress in all things. It is a safe conduct, secured through all the future. No sin can bar your progress; there is deliverance from that. No temptation can altogether hem you in; there is ‘a way of escape’ with each temptation. To all duty, to

all privilege, to all lasting advantage, a door is set open before you. This, you will say, is a great thing: who can give it? 'He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.' Apart from Him, there is no key for the solid door that keeps us out from God, and back from all progress. Until He opens, there can but fall across our darkness, through some chink that the resolute assaults of ages have made in the door, a single ray of light from the land of brightness within. It depends on Christ (who has the key of all real and lasting blessedness, of all far-reaching and sure hope), who shall enter in, and who shall be excluded; who shall see the King's face, and who shall not. None has ever had eternal hope, to whom Christ has not given it. None has ever entered into bliss, to whom Christ has not set open the door. He is the source of happiness to all the dead who are now blessed. And it is Christ who is to shape your future. However little you may think of Him, however unwilling you may be to have any connection at all with Him, the fact is, that your whole eternal destiny hangs on His decision. He has the key; and what more can you make of it? You

cannot get past Him ; it must come to this at the last, that you receive from Him, if you are to be rid of the evil.

He is holy, and He is true. He that keeps the gate of the kingdom is One that will not suffer to enter anything that will defile and mar the pure and unshaded glory within. He will not suffer to enter in that thing which has made you weak, and has preyed on your weakness. He is holy, so that His truth is truth you may trust to the utmost. The word of His calling is not the utterance of a sudden flood of feeling ; it is the true expression of His eternally holy nature that seeks the highest good of all that lives, and will make you like to Himself, that His joy may be yours. He is true. Search inwards to the root of the motive of the offer He makes to you, and you will only find out more and more how genuine is the sincerity of His love. You will find much that does not appear at first sight, much that you do not expect, but all only more overwhelmingly proving His truth. He is true in the offer He makes, true in His word ; therefore go to Him openly and frankly. Do not go with any false pretext, as if you had to do with some one who does not know for whom it is

He provides salvation. Christ knows that 'the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:' it is not because there is a likeness between you and Himself that He invites you to eternal communion, but because He is true, and knows and acts upon the unlikeness between you and Himself, who is holy. Your hope is in this, that Christ is true, and has faced that truth, which you so fear to face,—the truth of your sin, the fact of your hopeless state. His is a truth you may depend upon, not only because He has pledged His word—His name as Saviour, but because truth lies deep in His character. He is holy, and therefore to eternity is true, not only in word, but in deed. He not only acts up to His own word, but acts up to the requirements of every case—acts according to the truth. Take His character in detail, and truth will be found in every part of it. His love is true. He suffered and died for you, not for a mere show of love,—not, forsooth, in order to persuade you of His love,—but because His love prompted Him to do this. He did not think He was doing too much, because He was acting from true and genuine love,—so true that it required Him to do all, to leave nothing undone that could be

done for those He loved. And because He is holy and true, that love continues the same now. He is not less unselfish now that He is in His reward. You may act now on that love, as if He were yet upon the cross.

To the Philadelphians He revealed Himself as the Holy and True, that they might not fear those false Jews who said, either that He was no true Messiah, or that, for Gentiles and uncircumcised, there was nothing but sin, and banishment from God and hope. But Gentiles as well as Jews have need of a hope,—of some person whose living energy and care can satisfy that hope. Gentiles as well as Jews are persuaded that this life does not reveal all God's power to bless. Gentiles as well as Jews find that here they have to let many desires die unsatisfied, and have often to sacrifice the good to obtain the better; and must often wonder how such things as happen can happen, and God be ruler still; and therefore, to Gentiles as well as Jews, Christ is revealed as the true Messiah,—satisfier of all hope, centre of all truth, on whom hangs all reality; the one last hold we have to keep us from disbelieving God and murmuring at our lot, from all scepticism of thought, and from all atheism of life.

What are you expecting as the result of all, as the end of all you have known and been? Is it much? Is your hope large? Then, through what door are you looking? If through that which Christ opens by His word, accept as your own his counsel here, 'Hold fast that which thou hast' until He comes. That is your proper attitude—waiting for Christ; looking patiently forward; not surprised if you get no more out of this world than He got, but holding still the word of His patience. Let all deny you, yet hold the word of Him whose right it is to give you entrance; and well may you be confident. Let all, as they look upon you, say, 'There is a Christian, if any lives!' and, if you have not the word of Him who has the key of David, you are undone as the most forgotten of the heathen. If you have His word, and are following towards His voice, then you will find that everything which befalls you will fulfil this promise: 'Behold, I come quickly.' Nearer and nearer will you be brought to Christ by all duty, and by all prohibition from active duty. And is it not already, in this life, a great boon to receive, from the holding of Christ's call in the gospel, that all that comes to the Christian is, in one form or another, Christ? Is it temptation?

then hold the word; believe that *He* is there opening a door of escape for you, and you will find Him really present. Is it death? Still it is the voice of your Lord, 'Behold, *I* come.' Is it that last, trying, and sifting end of all things? then still it is, 'Behold, *I* come.' Surely this is a grateful interchange, a blessed transformation, whereby everything that naturally hurts becomes saving, the poison of it medicinal, which causes every threatening cloud to burst, and reveal still the same loved and assuring form of your Saviour and Lord.

But this being given now, what remains? The promise is in this case no less appropriate than we have found it to be in each of the others. It is a promise to those who have little strength,—who swing to and fro, tossed on this world's roughness and tempest like a light bark at anchor in a gale,—but who still hold fast to the hope fixed within the veil. It is a promise of stability, expressed in four different and corroborative forms: it seems, more than the other promises, to wish to take a hold of the hearer and persuade of its truth. By repeated blows it would drive in the shaft past the barb. And here there is an appropriateness to the physical circumstances of the

Philadelphians, which was in singular harmony with their spiritual position. An ancient geographer says of it: 'The city of Philadelphia is full of earthquakes, and is daily shaken, now one part, and now another suffering, so that one wonders any should have been found to build, or any to inhabit it.' To the Christians who saw daily in their city the image of their own precarious position, Christ says: I will make the overcomer a pillar in the temple of my God; he shall have a sure and stable standing in the presence of God. Having passed in through that open door which I have set, and which he has always been passing through, drawn by my word, he shall go no more out: he shall know then that his right of entrance is incontestable, because I have the key; he shall have the name of the city written upon him, so that he cannot be lost from it; he shall be identified with heaven. Here bowed to the earth by a sense of his own unworthiness, and hiding his face even from Christ's people, and ashamed to say that he is of their number, he shall there be at home, in that new city filled with inhabitants that are also new through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Jews alarm you by claiming God as their own, and His

temple as theirs, and the holy city where He dwells as theirs, and my name they blaspheme; but it is *I* who have the key of David, I who can alone introduce to the true blessings of David any true Israelite. God is my God; all that He is, He is to me; for in me He is well pleased; His fulness and sufficiency are mine; I appropriate Him by all my obedience and service; and it is for you I appropriate Him. He is my God, that He may be yours. The temple of his worship is my body; the whole membership of my body, the whole number of those who come to Him through me, He fills with the presence of His glory. The city where He dwells is not this 'sin-worn,' earthly city, but that which is formed in heaven,—the *new* Jerusalem,—where nothing grows old or is worn done any more; where all the ill that you have earned and here inhabit shall have passed away, and all the good that Christ hath earned surrounds you with everlasting gladness.

VII.

Laodicea.

REV. III. 14-22.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write ; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God ;

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked :

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

NO one, who gives any thought to the matter, will confound the condition of Laodicea with that of any other of the seven churches. Its characteristic is distinctly asserted—it is lukewarm ; not profligate as Pergamos, nor hypocritical and formal as Sardis, but resting in a self-satisfied complacency, that would not recognise any higher condition or calling than that which had already been obtained. They do not pretend to any high rank of saintship, because they do not think *that* a position to be coveted or admired. They profess religion, but that is not what they pique themselves on. A little piety they judge a useful ingredient of their pursuits and interests ; but it must not be allowed to have the ascendancy or guiding place. They would not like to take their character from *it* ; to be known for their eminence in Christian grace ; to be pointed to as

the most penitent of sinners, or the most humble and fearing of saints;—that is by no means their ambition. They treat religion rather as a matter that may, in the course of events, come to be useful, than as of any present value; they treat it as men treat a king whose claim and seat seems somewhat insecure, who may be dethroned, and is therefore not to be served with the whole heart, life, and estate; but who yet may reign, and who must therefore be propitiated, and whose favour must be retained. They try to keep a middle course; they are ‘neither cold nor hot.’ They are not hot; that is, they have not towards Christ that fervent love, which often causes them to break forth in indignant defence of an earthly friend, or finds vent in declarations of affection, or useful gifts and services. They have not that absorbing interest in the world of faith which they have in the world seen; and to display half the diligence, the life, the devoted and vehement energy in things heavenly which they bestow upon things earthly, they would pronounce unreasonable, and probably compassionate as weak, or execrate as fanatical. They do not make matters spiritual the chief object of their care. They do not think it altogether

decorous to live as Christ's redeemed, nor would they quite like to be looked upon as anxious to be where Christ is, and to live now as He lived in the world. They do not like the word 'zeal' in connection with religion; and however desirable a quality it may be in worldly affairs, it must be banished from the church. A zealot is but a fanatic. An ardent, decided character is almost a necessary for success in everything else; but it spoils all in religion. And yet religion is acknowledged as a good thing. These lukewarm Christians are not cold, any more than they are hot. They are what we ordinarily call cold or lifeless, but not what Christ here calls cold. Here the two extremes are mentioned, and the lukewarm is that which lies between. The one extreme is fervent zeal in the cause of Christ; the other is the state of those who make no profession whatever,—who openly belong to the world, and have no part nor lot in the church. And nothing could more pointedly mark the exceeding disgrace and danger of a lukewarm condition, than the fact that our Lord here declares that utter rejection of His name, and absolute severance from His person, is preferable to this half-and-half condition. 'Would thou

wert cold or hot!’ Would that thou wert one thing or another, and not hanging between the two,—drawn in one direction by your profession, and in a totally opposite direction by your heart’s desires.

And it must be obvious to you why our Lord thus expresses himself. For there are specially two reasons for preferring a cold state to a lukewarm one: there is less of self-deception (and therefore more hope), and there is less injury done to other men; for few things, if any, retard the progress of Christ’s cause in the world so seriously as the lukewarmness of professing Christians. No one thinks of judging religion and taking his opinion of Christianity from the sayings or deeds of the ungodly and profane and infidel; but no one, unless gifted with unusual caution, can avoid judging of Christianity and Christ from those who profess to belong to his cause. These are the living, teaching exponents of what the religion of Christ is. If it is seen to be a mere matter of indifference—that only makes a man undecided, wavering, and dishonest—that keeps him in constant suspense and oscillation between holiness and sin—that shakes the old foundations of his life, and gives him no new

foundation,—then, of course, men will be warned off from Christianity. If that is Christianity, then it is a useless encumbrance. This judgment goes on continually; every day men are hardening thus. It is not the nature of one in a thousand to judge of a matter by its origin, principles, or abstract scheme, but by its practical exhibition, its fruit, its concrete form, and effect in the individual. What a man wants from religion, is help in his life and rest in his soul. He wants something that will make him very different from what he is—something powerful; and when he sees how little Christian truth *does*, he turns away. If it has done so little for others, why will it do more for him? If the faith of Christ *can* be held so easily and profitlessly, what hope can he have that in *his* case it will be influential? He wants something to *make* him a godly man: if these are the men Christianity makes, then Christianity is not for him.

Apart, then, from the ruin to a man's *own* soul which a lukewarm condition works, he disseminates, by his very existence, ruinous views of Christianity. Christ, looking upon his cause on earth, sees how it is hindered by such, and says, 'Would thou wert cold or hot!'

And in saying this, his voice is strengthened by the conscience of every one of us. It is our constant sentiment, Let a man be decided and honest one way or other ; anything rather than a wavering, indifferent, superficial professor, who will profess truths he does not act upon, and acknowledge obligations he never discharges ; whose feelings are no deeper than his lips, and whose faith has never approached his heart ! If he believes that Christ died for him, in order that he might live to Christ, and be an image of Christ in this world, doing no longer his own will, then let him act so ; if he do not believe this, then let him say so.

Now, it is very useful to observe, what is further indicated in this epistle, that this lukewarm and most dangerous state is not a hypocritical state, but a state of self-deception. It is brought about, not by any intention or effort on our part, but by want of effort ; it is a state of defect. It is not the elaborate cleansing and decoration of all that meets the eye of man, to cover the impurity which lodges consciously in the soul. It is a self-satisfied condition. It makes no high pretension, and is quite unaware that there is anything which needs to be either hidden or corrected. It acts on the ignorant

mistake, that a man may choose the level at which he may stand,—may regulate how much of the influence of religion he is to receive. A man in this state, if charged with his deficiency, confidently replies, ‘ But I make no profession;’ not meaning thereby that he cuts himself off from all connection with Christ, but that he makes no such profession as should lead people to expect anything but lukewarmness from him; as if there were different grades of profession, any of which he might choose at pleasure; as if there were not ‘*one body and one spirit*, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all;’ as if this were not the very thing he is charged with,—as the sin that, above all others, provokes our Lord to anger,—that he does not recognise to what he is called, and fancies he can profess the name of Christ, without professing fervent love to Christ, and fervent service in all things.

If not intentionally, then, but through ignorance, this condition be produced, what is it that promotes and maintains this ignorance? It is, first, that resting in things outward which is here detailed: ‘Thou sayest, I am rich, and

increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' It is true that these words are generally considered to apply to spiritual things; but whether you consider the real condition of Laodicea, or the accompaniments of any similar condition, or the connection of the verses of this epistle, you will be convinced that the words refer, in the first instance, to outward circumstances. Laodicea *was* a very wealthy city; so wealthy, that when, a few years before this epistle was written, it was destroyed by an earthquake, the citizens characteristically disdained to ask help of the Roman senate, and at their own cost raised anew their city. *They* had need of nothing. Further, if you attend to the form of this verse, you will find that what our Lord charges them with is not falsehood, but ignorance. Thou sayest so and so, *and* dost not know this other truth. Thou sayest what is quite true, for you are rich, as you understand riches; but you do not know that, with all your riches, you are poor. You are not false, as Sardis is; but you let one little truth hide the far more important. So near to your eye do you hold that coin of earthly gold, that you cannot see the brilliance of the sun in the heavens. You dwell on what you are, and

forget what you are not. It is true enough you are rich; but the very fact of your being so, and of your dwelling on this, to the oblivion of all else, is impoverishing and destroying you.

And, further, does not this precisely agree with what we may daily observe of the birth and growth of a lukewarm condition? Who has not something to tell of the tendency of prosperity to dull spiritual fervour? Who, in great things or in small, has not felt the power of the world to win the soul from devotion to Christ? To be comfortably wrapped in the world's goods, is a precarious position for a Christian. 'Hardly will a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven.' The gospel is at a disadvantage addressing such. The one thing the gospel requires in man for its success is—felt need. Anything that dulls the feeling of need, proportionately dulls the welcome given to the gospel offer. Salvation is for those who have need of everything; who stand as bare souls before God, and feel their poverty and vileness, their insecurity and helplessness. But go to a Laodicean, go to a man who has enjoyed a long course of prosperity,—who enjoys already all that his heart desires,—tell him that the Son of God became man in order that he might find

supply for all his wants, both now and hereafter, and he will be at a loss to understand why this should have been done. He will not reject the matter of fact; he will admit the historical truth of the life and death of Christ; nay, he will acknowledge the love of God in considering man's condition, and adapting to it His own riches and power, but withal he does not receive Christ as a sole and sufficient Fountain of life. He does not know, or at least he does not feel, any urgent needs; and until a man receives from Christ, he cannot but be lukewarm. He is not infidel, he is not cold, he has no objections to acknowledge Christ in some acts of worship; but so long as he is *getting* nothing from Christ,—nothing that can compete in reality and advantage with what he is getting from the world,—it stands to reason that he should be only lukewarm; and in fact he will be only lukewarm. He will give his gratitude, and devote his pursuit and service to what he knows the value of: he will love the world warmly, because from it he has received what persuades him he has need of nothing.

So evil is this condition, that it exhibits a new feature in the character of our Lord; provokes a sentiment scarcely elsewhere displayed,

—the sentiment of utter disgust, sickening revulsion. Others He may more vehemently upbraid, more terribly destroy; but from none does He turn with such loathing. Yet, surely this is a very common condition. And this epistle will have been very useful to us, if it shall have taught us to feel with our Lord regarding lukewarmness. The difficulty of detecting our own lukewarmness lies, as we have seen, in this, that it is accompanied with self-satisfaction. First, then, are you self-satisfied? Are you quite willing to live another week, or another year, or to the end, just as you are? Do you say, I have need of nothing? The Philadelphians had little strength, and found their course one of great difficulty; and this was their very salvation. They *had* to go to Christ for strength; they were constrained to test his fulness. And just in proportion to your reception from Him, will be your love to Him. Therefore He counsels the Laodiceans, as the cure of their lukewarm condition, to buy of Him. We cannot make those priceless purchases from Christ without rendering Him our hearts. We may *pretend* to receive from Him, and remain lukewarm; but go and get from Him what is given freely and without

price,—because no price is at all commensurate with its value,—and you will no longer be lukewarm, but zealous and repentant. It follows, as day follows the rising of the sun, that zeal follows the acceptance of Christ and his gifts.

But very probably you are quite aware of this. Possibly it is for this very reason that you will not ask Christ for much, because you are sure that this would make you zealous. You do not desire to be zealous—would much rather be lukewarm; and therefore you will not simply rely on Christ for daily holiness,—will not accept the entire and eternal forgiveness He can give and offers,—will not promise yourself all that He promises in His word. You know there are some who do live on Him; but that is not your ideal of how a man should pass this life. You rather side with those who, when urged to something like fervour in Christ's cause, say, 'Nonsense! that is carrying matters too far; we are not going to make martyrs of ourselves.' Well, if this be so, if you are thus lukewarm, this epistle has this one unmistakeable, plain-spoken lesson for you—that you had far better have nothing at all to do with Christ. You may, if you please, frame a religion for

yourselves, and so live as you think fit ; but do not call it the religion of Christ. Be, at the least, honest. Do not sacrifice the very foundations of your moral nature in order to become religious. If you cannot be honest in religion, then do not be religious. You gain nothing by it, but lose a great deal. Understand what it is you mean by your professed attachment to Christ. If it be your only hope of salvation, if all your hope is in Him, then all your love and service is due to Him. If He be *not* your Saviour, then He is nothing to you. The religion whose centre is a dying Redeemer, on whose love the salvation of all depends, requires that every professor of it be bound by fervent devotion to Him. No other condition of things is conceivable, as consistent either with common sense or any principle of our nature ; and for a man to rest in any other, is the merest thoughtlessness and shallowest self-deception. In some matters a mean may be justifiable ; but here it is all or nothing,—day or night, life or death, Christ or sin and all its fruits.

In a word, do not pass this epistle without setting this distinctly before you, that a lukewarm condition is worse than a cold one. You receive no advantage from it whatever. If

once you made no profession, nor ever thought of praying to Christ, and now do profess to be His, but are not serving Him, nor loving Him wholly, nor praying to Him as your one hope, then your last state is worse than your first. To be a Christian at all, you must be a fervent Christian. To be the least of Christ's people, you must in all your person and concerns be His. To have the narrowest entrance into the kingdom, you must use violence. If you are not doing so,—if you cannot to your own conscience say you are zealous,—then do not deceive yourself; there is no profit in that. If you see no reason for being zealous,—if you do not feel much real gratitude to Christ,—then do not pretend zeal and gratitude; do not suppose you can reach heaven, or be any the nearer it, by anything but the sheerest honesty and simplest truth. If the fervent love of a grateful spirit be the absolute requisite of the Christian, do not be content with less; but do not pretend to have it; get from Christ what will make you grateful. If you have no need that you know of, which the world does not readily and sufficiently supply, then do not ask Christ for what (all the time) you are hoping to receive from the world; but ask Him, first of

all, to shew you that you are what you are. Begin at the beginning. Be not afraid of the sweeping away of false ideas of your state. It is painful, but it is *truth*; and the truth is lasting, and leads to life. Be not afraid of repentance, for repentance belongs also to truth. Be not afraid of zeal; for however, in this cold and unbelieving world, zeal may be scorned and condemned, it is the only right state of one who is truly Christ's. In doing these things, you will follow the advice of one who never erred in counsel, who never gave advice that was not worth following, and who here shews you how you may escape from a lukewarm state: 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.'

And in what character does our Lord utter this solemn warning and these wholesome admonitions to the lukewarm? To those who are undecided (neither one thing nor another), who have no idea of martyrdom, and who fear to exchange the world's good for Christ, He also

appears in a threefold character,—as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, and the beginning of the creation of God. The Amen,—the one whose character this word best expresses, in its opposition to all wavering, fearing, doubting, calculating indecision,—the assured, decided One; every one of whose actions crowned what had gone before, and corroborated it; who had a single aim, and acted it out; whose profession and life were absolutely harmonious; who professed nothing on which His mind was not made up; and who therefore was free from all half-measures, and gave himself, with the whole energy and life of His nature, to each act His principles required; whose path was *one*—straightforward and consistent. No feature of His character is more conspicuous in His life than this, coming out even in His words, as He so often confirms the deliverance of truth He is persuaded of by that ‘Verily, verily,’ from which this title Amen (the same word) is taken. The more we look upon Him, the more we discover that One has dwelt safely amid all the strange problems and darkness of this life, and has still been persuaded of the truth; not one shadow of suspicion flitting ever so hastily over His soul from any clouds of human error, from

any one-sided representation of truth, or from any difficulties which truth led to. His was not that decision which is loud and vehement, which needs the sound of its own voice to encourage it, and the noise of its own bustle to deafen it to all objections, all questions, and all different opinion; but the quiet, unostentatious decision, assured and steady, because resting on the truth. Surely by this feature of His character our Lord rebukes us! Why not go forward, as He went? Are those things doubtful in our case which were certain in His? Is it doubtful that God is to be served above all, and loved above all? Is it doubtful whether, if we do commit ourselves to a zealous, consistent course, we may not at the end repent? or has not Christ been the confirmer of all truth to us, as well as assured of all in Himself; and has not His end certified us of what ours will be; and does He not, in this very epistle, set Himself before us, saying, *Overcome, as I also overcame?*

But what, in the first place, did this following of the truth lead Christ to? It led Him to a martyr's death. It led Him to become, in all his course, the faithful and true martyr (for this is the word), who would not flinch from follow-

ing the truth, whatever it led to, because it *was the truth*—was the right thing to guide; beside which nothing else was to have a voice. What He would have you to do, is just what He Himself did—to act on the truth. Do you believe that such and such a thing is right? then question no more, but do it. Especially, do you believe that what the word of God reveals is true—that Christ did die, and now lives for you? then act on this. Doing so, the reproach of lukewarmness will be taken away. But does fear still war with the truth, and tempt you to be blind, or to forget it? Is there ever a warning voice that says, See what you lose, think of the sacrifices you must make, if you are to follow the dictates of a fervent spirit,—think how poor you will yourself become, if you are to be all for Christ? Then look to Christ in this third character—‘the beginning of the creation of God.’ Where did all these things come from that you so fear to lose? how do they exist? Simply from Christ. He is their beginning, as He is the beginning of all creation. And do you fear to lose by coming closer to the Source of all? Does the light of the world become less bright as you travel towards the sun? Surely, of all fears, this is the vainest—

that you will have less of things created by having more of the favour of Him who is the beginning and fountain of all creation! Do you *believe* that Christ is Creator, and can you yet fear loss in following Him?

This being the person who exhorts you to fervour, consider the attitude He assumes; or, to speak more truly, the attitude He maintains still towards you. Behold, He stands, and has long been standing, at the door knocking; and, as He knocks, His voice has told you who it is that knocks. He has declared His desire for nearer fellowship than you will give Him. His love cannot be put off with such distant intercourse as satisfies your lukewarmness. He will come in and sup with you, and you with Him. As the uninvited friend, welcome at all hours, whose familiarity pleases, so He would be with you, that in that close and eager communion your heart may learn to burn. Listen, then, to this 'Behold,' though all things else tell you to sleep, and still to dream and sleep; think of Him who, in His infinite compassion and most humbling forbearance, has stood so long seeking, from age to age, reception in all human hearts, and who now stands, held still distant from you by your cold unwillingness,

but still supplicating admission, unwilling to depart and leave you! Though you have driven Him from warm love, banished Him from your heart, He stands expectant at the door. When, by sickness or affliction, you were taken aside from the noise of this world, when all other sounds were muffled to you, did you not hear still this patient knock? When in some pause from the world's clamour and intoxication,* when the calmness of some still scene of nature surrounded you, and laid to sleep the tumult within, did you not then hear this calm, ceaseless knocking? did you not feel that there were other calls than those of this world, yes, and calls more worthy to be listened to? Were it not well to rise and give entrance to the divine Suppliant, to suffer Him to enter among those other guests within you, and check their revelry by His presence? Is His Father's house within you to be still a den of thieves? Are the only sounds to be heard there to be the sounds of trade and business,—thoughts that keep God out of His own just place? Why is it that you keep Him out? Will Christ do you harm? Can He be too near, too well known, too much confided in? What occupies your heart with so

* See Vaughan *in loc.*

deadly an influence, that you cannot receive Christ? Ought not the very fact that there is something within you that cannot co-exist with strong love to Christ, to warn you against that thing, whatever it be? And think, too, what it may bring you to; for you may keep Christ for ever *out*. He will not force an entrance. What will become of you when He departs, never more to return,—His last knock given, His last appeal heard, died away on the air, and refused? But let it never be so. The love of Christ is within your reach. The highest, most perfect portion that can be given or received, presses at your gates.

To him who receives Christ, and by the kindling fervour of His love is saved from lukewarmness, and overcomes, the promise is given of sitting with Christ on His throne. This seems to be appropriate as the seventh, completing, and final promise given to the conquering Christian. It is the sum of all that a Christian looks for—victory with Christ. Upheld here mainly by this, that he is on Christ's side, and identified with Him, his reward is, that he be triumphant with Him. He who is 'the beginning of the creation of God,' sits with the Father on the throne,—has the ab-

solute control and eternal government of all persons and events; and they who are not blinded by the present and visible things created, but through them see, and above them trust in, the creating Word, shall, along with Christ, have all creation at their disposal; not, certainly, for selfish gratification (that is not your desire, nor would be your reward), but to carry out the will of Christ everywhere, and to shed abroad over all the blessings of His Spirit. And observe to whom this promise is immediately given. This, the greatest of the promises, is given to those who are lowest among the professors of Christ—who fill our Lord with a holy disgust. It is these whose love He still seeks to quicken and to win, and to these His throne is promised. Take courage, then, if you feel little love for Christ, and do not think it must always be the same with you. He has long borne with your indifference, not because it is a state to be tolerated, but because He knows it is destructive, and cannot leave you in it. Have you not everything on your side? Will Christ be indifferent whether you remain lukewarm or no? Is not this entreaty, ‘Would thou wert cold or hot!’ a promise of all help to you in seeking fervour? Is He not waiting to

be your intimate, that you may learn to love Him? He does not weary of you because He *finds* you in fault; nay, nor even when you are slow in learning; but He still sets before you the throne, and eternal partnership with Himself.

These are the words which our Lord leaves with us, to assure us of that constant presence of His, which the world believes not, because it does not see; and of that constant fellowship of His, which the world desires not, because it has never known. Are these words true? Then surely the Lord is at hand. Are you distant and cold to Him? Do you feel little joy at learning that He is so near and so accessible? Have you little love, and do you think it must always be the same with you? Then remember that Christ is not distant nor cold towards you; that He is not indifferent whether you remain lukewarm or no; that in this entreaty, 'Would thou wert cold or hot!' there is a promise of all help to you in seeking fervour; and that in this promise of His you have every security that you also shall learn to love Him.

VIII.

Conclusion.

REV. XXI. 7.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things.

OUR consideration of the epistles of our Lord to his churches will have served an end much inferior to that which is intended, if it cause us to pass on to other parts of the word of God, as if now we had exhausted this. The miner who dug a few feet below the surface, and ascertained that a rich bed of gold lay beneath, and then passed on to seek new discoveries, leaving the opened gold-pit to be filled in and hidden by the wear of weather and of time, would not be more foolish and blind to his own interests. For the things written are not only to be understood, but to be used; and can, indeed, only be understood by being used. Like a friend whose friendship, though appreciated, is not known to the full till tried severely, and found equal to the trial, the Scriptures must be tested by the necessities of your life, before you sufficiently understand or

justly value them. You have not only to learn what is in them for all; you have to take what is in them for you. And if there be one part of Scripture more than another to which this applies, it is that which declares promises. A promise is nothing save to those who rest on it. The descriptions of a better country are set before you, not to please your fancy for an hour, but to induce you to set out for that country, in the faith that it is what it has been described, and in the hope that its riches will be satisfying to you. If you are not thus using the descriptions given and offers made, then there might as well be no such country, so far as you are concerned. It matters not how useful these promises have been to others, nor how many are now being disentangled from the evil of this world by the power of them, if you yourselves have not made them your hope, and be not living by them. And if the seven promises of Christ, which were uttered to these seven churches, do not contain in sum all that you desire for your future, then there is something in your present that needs amendment.

No doubt, it throws contempt upon this present life to gather up into a future state all that is perfect, all that is supremely desirable;

but is it not the truth that many of our very deepest desires are not here satisfied, and are only laid to sleep when the windows of heaven open upon us, and some rays of its light fall upon us, and enable us to believe that, though this world and that are not one, yet they are united? And why be so jealous of this world and its rights? why so anxious to substantiate its claim to glory and true value? You are not more deeply involved in this world than in that. It is a very short-sighted selfishness indeed that does not see that the future is its own as well as the present. The future is laid before you, not to shew you what belongs to others, but to invite you to what is your own. You must take your part there, not as here for a short time, and in a narrow and restricted manner, but in eternal and complete life. And therefore does Jesus Christ, the one Prophet to whom God delivers this revelation of things that must shortly come to pass, appear in the beginning of this book as a leader, on the eve of hard and many-fortuned battle, animating his followers carefully, each according to their need, and setting before them such rewards as they will think of in the heat of fight; and when sinking from fatigue, and outnumbered,

and nigh overcome, shall yet be braced again with fresh nerve, and conquer through hope. In the middle of the book He unfolds some striking incidents of this long-continued battle, guides the eye to the figures of the leaders, and teaches us to discern, under gay plumes and behind glittering devices, the features and forms of our deadliest enemies ; and far from leading us to believe that the day is easily won, and the battle of little importance, He leads us very distinctly to expect emergencies of the most critical nature, and incidents of the most appalling circumstance and consequence ; and not till the end does the smoke and dust roll away, and let us see the acknowledged might of our Leader, and the hosts of the redeemed returning in peace and glory, with everlasting joy upon their heads.

These promises, then, contain all that Christ would have our hopes definitely to fix upon ; and there are some things to be observed upon them, as forming one whole, besides what may be noticed of them individually. That they are connected as a whole, would be noticed were there no other mark than this, that the first promise is of life as the necessary condition, substratum, or foundation of the others,

and that the last is of triumph, as the crown and completion of what has gone before.

1. The first promise is: 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.' Of this tree of life we have a short notice at the beginning, and a short notice at the end of the account of God's dealing with us. At the beginning, when man sinned, he was driven forth from paradise, and the flaming sword was set, lest he should return, and put forth his hand to the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. Whatever, then, this tree may have been, this we know concerning it, that whoso eats its fruit has immortal life, and that it is beyond our power to reach this fruit. At the end of the word of God, in the last chapter of this book, we are re-introduced to this tree, and are there taught that the fruit of it has again become accessible and available to man. Of the life which this tree affords, we gather these particulars: that it is now a healing life; that it is eternal and never-failing (bearing its fruit every month, from year's end to year's end; not waiting on the seasons of time, but exuberant in the abiding summer of eternity); that it is various in its supply, bearing twelve

manner of fruits ; and that it is enjoyed with *appetite*, or as the satisfaction and gratification of felt desire, which is denoted by putting forth the hand, plucking the fruit, and eating. It does not need to be pointed out that none of these particulars attach to the life we naturally live. Not *immortality* ; for as surely as every one who lives has been born, so surely must he die, and feels that there is behind death something more terrible than death, but which we can only call death eternal—having no word more full of terror and anxiety than this word ‘death.’ Not *healing* ; for the longer a man lives on the strength of a natural life, the weaker and nearer destruction does he tend. To progress in life, is to progress to death ; the more of life you have the less you retain. Not *variety* nor *appetite* ; for the surest way to pall a man’s appetite for natural life, and teach him its sameness, is to shew him its every form and variety, which being speedily run through and tasted, he sits down nauseated with what he has got, and wondering that there is no more ; and almost always coming to the conclusion of Job : ‘I would not live alway,’—believing that life may be endured as a necessity, but cannot be rested in as full and satis-

fyng, beyond which no desire can reach. Now, the life that is promised is such that, after looking on every other form of life, and comparing it with what the tree affords,—after giving loose to his desires, and letting them range to the furthest regions of fancy,—he would still turn to the tree unweariedly, as at the first, and, with the appetite of a first taste, pluck its fruit in preference to all else ; nothing so fitting, nothing so exactly corresponding to my nature, so covering all my wants, and gratifying the least of my desires, as this. And surely, if anything is calculated to encourage us in cleaving, at the risk of much pain and loss, to the right ; if anything can help us stedfastly to restrain our desires now to things commanded, and to live in what may seem to us a very lifeless and limited way ; if anything can enable us quietly to let go long-cherished desires, and crush others in the bud, because to satisfy them we should need to omit duty to God, or forget love to our neighbour ; if anything can reconcile us to a life that is often comfortless, often painful only, sometimes ghastly, and sometimes tormenting, and always ending in death, it is this,—that there is shortly to be given us entrance on a life, where all that

hurts and offends is excluded ; where there is healing and corrective for all that is here diseased, disordered, and distressing ; where all that is in us—all hope and affection, all faculty of heart and mind—shall be nourished to a complete and here unthought of maturity ; where the heart shall never be secretly gnawed by hopeless and scarce-understood desires, but with all its energy shall give itself to a life that is all understood and all delighted in ; where, in the all-comprehensive expression of Scripture, ‘ there is no more curse ; ’ where each face shall reflect the joy and brightness of the Father’s ; and where our lips, forgetting the language of pain, lamentation, and sighing, shall be filled with the utterances which hearts overflowing with joy and love shall evermore dictate.

2. And to this promise add the second ; for this is a life that ‘ shall not be hurt of the second death ’ (Rev. ii. 11). All that we can say of a man in this world is, that he *has been* healthy, has been invulnerable to all common ailments ; but, for all that, he will not escape death. It becomes not a whit more likely that he shall live for ever, though he live a century : and quite as sure is this second death to all

who are not accepting Christ's promise and deliverance. The certainty of the first, and most of the peculiarities of the first,—all that makes it a thing of dread,—only typifies the second. It is the second death to which we are, all of us, exposed by being born; just as, by being born, we are exposed to death natural. So that, to receive a life which shall not be hurt of the second death, is to receive a life which shall be hurt of nothing. It is that which has most claim to hurt us; which everything points to as our doom. All disease and weakness, all remorse and foreboding, point to death eternal as their end and consummation. The second death is not an accident, which may or may not befall you. It stands in the path of every man born into this world; it is your due; and unless there were some security against this, a promise of life would be vain. The difficulty of realising the blessedness of heavenly life, arises from our condition here, as looking forward to death. We are limited to so many years; bound by all the conditions of time; and however successful, hopeful, and happy, have still, all of us, to pass through the one common end of life. And we cannot, from this side of death, understand rightly what it can

be to live *in eternity*,—death for ever passed, and no termination possible. There is a hurry and rapidity in this present state, which all remark upon, and which is incongruous with the peace and rest of heaven. But when time shall be no longer, there will be room for everything to occupy its due portion of our thought and strength; we shall be free always to enjoy to the full *the now*. The present and the future shall never compete for our attention. There will be no hurrying on, no passing away, no regrets for unfinished joys, and purposes broken off before fulfilment. And what a complete alteration this must bring about, it is simply impossible to conceive. And when this promise of immunity from the second death is received, it imparts something of repose to the character even here. The creature of a day begins to breathe more freely, not in gasps, but in calm, deep respirations. The barriers confining him disappear; the horizon is now made only by his own weakness or power of vision. There is room for all growth and attainment; encouragement and promise given to every variety and magnitude of purpose and desire; and the soul perceives that a life without fear, hurt, or interruption, without weariness or

decay, without change, seasons, or flight, is its right, eternal condition, in which it can be all it is capable of being, and is a life worthy of Christ to give.

3. But though a new foundation and source of life be thus opened up to us, and though the future, which is the due of all, be reversed to those who are in Christ, what is the daily sustenance, and what the enjoyments of that life? The forbidden sustenance and enjoyments of this world are palpable and attractive, and seem to be very suitable to our nature. Suitable to some parts of our nature they are, else they would have no power of appeal to us; but we are commanded to be temperate and self-restrained, not to give ourselves up to everything here that attracts, because our nature is at present disordered, and does not act in all its parts harmoniously,—passions and appetites often drawing in a different direction from judgment and conscience. And to encourage us in this patient self-restraint, there is a promise given of sustenance and enjoyment proper to our nature, which shall be enjoyed hereafter (Rev. ii. 17). Now, just in so far as we cleave to this promise, and repress unlawful desires, do we become prepared for the full

enjoyment prepared for us ; and in so far as we follow the bent of one part of our nature,— of a desire of the flesh or of the mind,—do we unfit ourselves for a full and perfect enjoyment hereafter. In resisting temptation, we seem to do ourselves a wrong, and to suffer loss ; but, in crushing one part of our being, we develop and strengthen the whole. You never obeyed conscience, to the detriment of a carnal or earthly desire, without becoming a stronger and better soul, capable of doing and enduring more. Each act of this kind,—every resistance of a strong drawing to pleasant evil,—makes you fitter for, and draws you nearer to, true pleasure ; carries on a main part of the work for which your Redeemer looks,—*the recovery of the ascendancy of conscience over every part of your being*. And a great help in this difficult, constant, and painful work is, the promise that sustenance and enjoyment of a perfect kind, adapted in every way and particular to the requirements of your nature, is already prepared for you. Christ asks you to resist temptation ; to keep yourself from much in which many find their whole delight,—not that you may enjoy less, but that you may enjoy infinitely more. It is still his *love* that promises. It is quite

true we can scarcely see at once *how* such natures as ours, so innately sentient and passionate, are to have full, free, unrestrained enjoyment hereafter; but it does not matter that we should know. We have the word of Christ for it, that a liveliness of life and a fulness of joy shall be ours, such as is not here conceived by the most ardent; and this is enough; it is *hidden* manna that is promised for our support. But this one thing it is most important to observe, as indicated by the second part of this third promise (Rev. ii. 17), that the chief help in resisting worldly temptation, and the chief training of conscience to its high office of command, is communion with Jesus Christ. In every particular Christ presents Himself as the opposite of the world. All that it promises, He gives of a better kind; and here, in the stone with the name written upon it, which no man knows save him that receives it, He offers you His personal, individual love. As a sworn intimate, He will kindly receive and share all your secret burdens; your most secret desires He will regard. He will be to you as close as a secret known can draw two human beings; that is, as close and mingled as hearts can be,—He knowing of you what none other

knows, and you knowing of Him what none other knows. This may well keep you from the world. If you have this, you have what you would give up for nothing at all else, and what nothing can take from you.

4. As this promise indicates that there is sufficient support and enjoyment, so the next (Rev. ii. 26-28) promises sufficient employment and honour in the life everlasting. The third and fourth promises are closely connected; for the ruling power promised in the fourth is already hinted at in the power of *self-command* required by the third. Every one who has attended to the declarations of Scripture concerning future employments and rewards, must have observed how largely they are made up of promise of authority and ruling power. And perhaps not a few have rather shrunk from this, as being the last thing they would desire as a reward. There are backward as well as ambitious natures; and to the backward it is no object of hope to receive five or ten cities as their care, or to rule the nations. And no doubt there is a variety of reward, adapted to the various character and diverse training of the redeemed; so that some must continue to cling much more to other features of the promised

life than to this. Still, admitting this, there is no one who may safely omit any of these promises, as no way concerning him; and if a man be faithfully endeavouring to overcome, following Christ's footsteps, he will both discover his need of such a promise as this, and also be imbued with the spirit of rule. For in proportion as a Christian learns the excellence and worthy supremacy of Christ, and becomes habituated to viewing Him as indeed the Head over all things, does he wonder how the world continues as it is, and desire that the rule, spirit, and influence of Christ may become universal. The more profit and deeper peace a man finds from being himself ruled by Christianity, the more truly does he desire to extend and establish this rule. *And he does so extend it*, often unconsciously to himself, by all that he does in a Christian spirit; and you could offer to such a man no more attractive employment than to represent Christ, and promote His blessed will and influence.

Moreover, the training of our spirits to obedience fits us for command,—according to the well-ascertained maxim, that none can rule well who cannot obey well,—a maxim founded on the truth, that all government must begin

with self-government. With equal truth Christ could say: 'I am come not to be ministered unto, but to minister;' and, 'I am a King.' In Him these meet; and necessarily, according to the make of human nature, there meet the lowliest obedience that ever was rendered, and the supremest kingliness of spirit that ever blessed this earth. Letting Himself down to the deepest degradation, He remained superior to any possible diminishing of the true glory of His nature.* Submitting at all times to be questioned and tempted, never once did He lose composed self-command, which gave Him the victory, and made all men feel that He was above them, and spoke with authority. And this because He was at one in His own spirit; all His nature working in one direction, not interrupted or distracted by turbulent passions. And here is our training as rulers to begin: in learning, first of all, that there is always one thing that ought to be done, and done with our might; in learning what 'duty' means; in learning authoritatively to command ourselves with a voice speaking within ourselves, yet higher than ourselves—the voice of eternal truth, as much spoken to us now as if God's

* Compare Ullmann's *Sinlessness of Jesus*, Sec. iv.

voice were heard at our side; in learning that we are servants, and in imbibing the spirit of true service.

5. Such being the life, the sustenance and enjoyments, the employment and honour of it, how shall they be gifted who inherit it? The fifth and sixth promises (Rev. iii. 5 and 12) shew us not only the general condition into which the society of the redeemed are ushered, but the personal changes which pass upon the condition of each one of them. There shall be first, according to the fifth promise, a declaration of their real connection with Christ, and a manifestation of their acceptance with God. Clothed in white raiment, they shall be confessed by name before the King and inhabitants of heaven. A Christian here believes he is forgiven; there he shall know it with an assurance that, let belief be what it may, it cannot equal. The reality of Christ's substitution, the union of the believer with Christ, the substantial results of faith, and especially the sufficiency of the satisfaction made for sin, shall be understood hereafter as they are not now. All men and angels shall see the efficacy of Christ's work in finished result; a world redeemed shall appear as his work. The

inquiry of all shall be turned towards those who walk in white; and to the question, 'Who are these?' the reply, 'These are they who have washed their robes in the blood of Christ,' shall open up the infinite merit of Christ's atonement, and shew Him as the centre of all purity—the one Physician of all spiritual disease, and cleanser from all defilement. So clean and utter a purification,—so spotless even to the eye of God,—shall there be possessed by each Christian, that to asperse any one of that multitude, would be to cast a stain upon the Redeemer. In this manifestation to the eye and ear of the great glory and effect of Christ's righteousness, there will be attained an assurance of personal salvation such as cannot be now possessed. However assured you may now be, will there be nothing added to your certainty when the voice of Christ has acknowledged you, and confessed you before the Father as one for whom He died? However your bitter remorse and shame have passed away, however you have overcome the weakening effects of guilt, will not some deeper peace possess your soul, some opener boldness shew itself in your face and actions, when you yourself, and all who know you, are assured of your

connection with Christ, your favour in the eye of God, and your complete forgiveness and regeneration? Do what we will, shame hangs about us here, our constant companion. Whose heart has not more or less to condemn him of, and undermine the full boldness of his confidence? Shame cannot dwell where there is no sin, and therefore our first parents, though naked, were not ashamed; and the clothing they sought, after their sin, is but one fragment of the countless devices to put a decent covering and colour on our true character. But there is only one eternal covering of sin, and that is the robe here spoken of; to be acknowledged as Christ's, for whom He died, this is the only cure of our shame. To enter eternal life on any false plea, with sin unaccounted for, or slightly covered over, is impossible; and, if possible, were to lay a ruinous foundation for eternal happiness. We must be truly at peace with God, truly forgiven, truly accepted by Him; and this being so, our eternal life receives an unshaken foundation. There must be nothing left to a perhaps, nothing intentionally held out of mind, which may afterwards come up and mar all. Our whole past must be taken account of; and with this past in view, in

God's view, and in our own, we must enter eternity.

6. And thus only is it possible that the sixth promise can be fulfilled, and that we can be enduringly and stably set as pillars in the temple of God. The sins that have brought us again and again to shame and doubt of our connection with Christ, will there be finally overcome, and we shall go no more out. The name of God and of the heavenly city will be written upon us, and we shall, in all our interests, be identified with Christ and His redeemed. All that the fifth promise declares the Christian's right to through Christ, the sixth declares the confirmation of. He is not only introduced as pure and acceptable, but he receives assurance that he will never more turn to his sin, and fall from the state to which Christ has brought him. The endurance promised here is not the same as that which is implied in the second promise. It is an endurance not only in life, useful and enjoyable, but an endurance in a position so near to God, and so involved with the honour of God's name, that it implies an endurance in the highest holiness and favour of God. It is an endurance certified not only against outward calamity,

accident, or assault, but (which is more) against inward weakness, change, or unfaithfulness. To be able to depend upon what is henceforth eternally inseparable from ourselves, and to calculate on having strength equal to any emergency, this is beyond our present experience. To look upon sin as a thing past for ever ; to be able to promise ourselves a future freed from all interference and blight of our own or others' sin—this is reserved for the life above. *There* is a new city,—men gathered together in such societies and relations as fit their new dispositions, and accord with the will of God, whose city it is. One great cause of backsliding shall there no longer exist—the doubt whether we be indeed among the number of Christ's people. The name of the city, written upon every citizen, shall give him final and constant assurance that he is on Christ's side.

In the last promise (Rev. iii. 21) the substance of all victory is given : 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne ;' *i. e.*, every Christian will triumph with Christ. Throughout the promises there is indication that from Christ proceeds all good, and that to be with Him is the sum of all good. All that He promises He has Himself, by his

own obedient suffering, earned ; and to His own reward He invites all who in themselves have no hope, and who do not see how they can earn the least approach to any one of the blessings He gives. As little as we can undo what the first Adam has brought upon us, so little can we accomplish what the second Adam has achieved for us. In these promises is the sum of the *restoration* to our first estate ; the reversal of every evil that has come upon us through sin ; the re-union of our persons to God, and bringing back of our entire condition to the love of God. And of these seven promises, the seventh is the sum. Having this symbol of 'victory with Christ,' let each man who finds his condition here unsatisfying fill up the general form here given with his own specially desired victory ; and for all the variety of evil which the world exhibits, this victory will prove sufficient. But it is by *overcoming* we reach victory, and not by idly standing as spectators of what Christ has done, and waiting till we be transferred from a state full of evil, to a state where evil has ceased to be known. In temptation you must overcome. In affliction you must overcome by hearty submission ; in sickness by patient waiting. Upon every form

of evil you are bound to make war, not to run from it, as if it would die out of itself. You must do what you can to hasten the victory, and strive against sin as if you had none but yourself to depend on. If you look for a life where there is no death, conquer the fear of death now. If you look for a life of full enjoyment, conquer the craving for all kinds of enjoyment here. If you expect to be shameless, learn to found your confidence securely on Christ, and beware of doing what shames you even before men. If you expect to be employed in representing Christ as a ruler, learn now to represent Him in the world, and shew now the spirit of His rule. If you expect to see the entire efficacy of His work for our redemption, and be thereby confirmed in all hope and righteousness, then do not neglect to ponder the life and death and person of Christ.



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